AN ADLERIAN CASE OR A CHARACTER BY SARTRE?

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At the beginning of our acquaintance, P. H., a Parisian in his 30's, tells us that he would have liked to spend all his life on a sixth-floor balcony. Looking down at the people in the street and seeing them in so uncommon a perspective he laughs at them, believing that their pride in going upright can impress only those who walk on the same level.

He also thinks that the towers of Notre Dame de Paris and Sacre Coeur, furthermore the Eiffel Tower and the sixth floor of his house, are excellent symbols of a superiority of position. Indeed he places himself over all men whom he considers as his enemies.

These first remarks of P. H. allow us, from the Adlerian viewpoint, to formulate his style of life. Listening further to his talk, we must find out if all his guiding lines converge toward a goal or permanently looking down upon men, being isolated, and of little use. From such a convergence we would conclude that this personality-ideal or goal would make him friendless and incapable of a mutually satisfactory sexual relationship. We would also imagine him in a mediocre job demanding little cooperativeness.

Self-Training for Murder

He continues to speak about himself, and we do not interrupt him: Having to leave the height of his sixth floor when going to the office he feels oppressed by the people in the street, as, indeed, when he faces them they no longer look like ants. Many of them are taller than he.

And he fears they may touch him (thus interfering with his goal of isolation, of distance). The very idea of being touched by someone terrifies him, and he would keep his gloves on when colleagues conventionally take off theirs before shaking hands.

Once when he saw on the pavement a dead man who was all covered with blood he tried to feel nothing, and said to himself: "They have just painted him red!" However, he fainted and when helpful people encouragingly patted him on the shoulder he would have liked to kill them.

A man's goal (or guiding fiction) of an exaggerated positional superiority might lead him to make love to many women, always being above them in the act. This, however, cannot be P. H.'s attitude, as we saw that his means for keeping in a superior position are isolation and distance. He reveals the fitting sexual aberration by telling us that he used to go every first Saturday of the month to a disorderly woman, and got complete satisfaction by just watching her undress.

One Saturday this streetwalker was not at her usual place, and at first he was afraid to go to another one. He remembered, however, that some time ago he had bought a revolver which he really cherished. It made him feel strong. He used to hold it in his pocket during lonely walks on the boulevards. On that particular Saturday, he went home to fetch it, and then fearlessly approached another prostitute.

Climbing with this woman to the fourth floor of a hotel he felt superior when he noticed that she breathlessly had to stop from time to time whereas for him the ascent was child's play.

When she reproached him mockingly for his way of looking and not acting, he drew his revolver and frightened her. This led to the physical gratification for which he had come. He paid her and left the room, proud of having scared a whore which, he thought, was no mean feat.

On leaving this hotel it occurred to him that he would like to bewilder all people. When later that night he dreamed of the hotel scene, he felt sorry that he had not shot at the nude woman. In the following three nights he saw her in his dreams, again naked and having around her navel six little holes, due to his shots.

It is neither natural nor easy to kill someone, and we do not need Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex to understand Hamlet's hesitation to murder his uncle (8, p. 309). Adler asked the Hamlet interpreters who emphasize only the indecision of the hero, "would they more easily decide to murder their uncle, than Hamlet did" (1, p. 211n). So drastic an act as murder requires mental preparation and training. In the first chapter of his novel, *Crime and Punishment*, this is graphically shown by Dostoevsky, of whom Nietzsche said that he was the only man who had taught him something of psychology.

P. H. had started the training for murder in his dreams, and he continued it in diurnal fantasies in which he shot from behind at people in the street. He also practiced at the rifle range of a nearby fair ground.

His revolver allowed him six shots, and should he, to achieve his greatest superiority, some day really kill a few people in a street, the public would have to be prepared for it so as to appreciate his "grandeur." When, therefore, one day his office colleagues talked admiringly about the aviator Lindbergh he said: "This is a white hero and he does not interest me; I like black heroes." After he had clumsily tried to explain what he meant by "black hero" one fellow said: "You mean an anarchist?" But P. H. replied calmly: "No, because in their way anarchists love mankind."

"I know now what you mean," said a well-read colleague, "your type is called Herostratus. Hungering for notoriety this famous Greek found nothing better than to set fire to a temple."

P. H. also learned that the name of the architect who built the Artemis temple at Ephesus was no longer known; he remarked that Herostratus had calculated well. Here he stopped the conversation, being sure that the colleagues would remember his words some day, and feeling "encouraged" by the example of this vain old Greek. Like Herostratus, P. H. now meant to illuminate the world with the short and violent flash of his murderous bullets.

The dream he had during several nights again indicates his training: "I was an anarchist and had placed myself in the way of the Tsar, having with me an infernal machine. When the cortege passed, the bomb exploded and we were killed, me, the Tsar, and three decoration-bedecked officers, thus offering a spectacle for the crowd." We note the words "the bomb exploded"; according to his life style which lacks the element of initiative, he did not actively throw it.

Absenting himself from his office for several weeks he was dismissed and now continued to work for the publicity of his planned murder by making 103 copies of a long letter addressed to well-known French writers.

He told them they all have "humanism" in their blood and that they may be curious to know what a man can be like who does not love human beings. He likes men so little that soon he will kill a number of them. He believes that he was born with hatred for the others. He dislikes to use their very words, detesting the common language as too intimate a bond between himself and his contemporaries. When the recipients of the letters would read in the papers that a madman in a furor had killed five people in the street, they would know better, namely, that the killer was perfectly calm. He signed the letters with his full name, and got them ready to be posted in due course.

We are not astonished to learn that P. H. hesitated for another period, spending his last money for meals to be delivered from a restaurant to the door of his home.

Finally, he confusedly shot several times at a man in the street. But he failed to run, as planned, in the direction of his house where he would have shot himself dead with the last bullet. Instead he hid in the toilet of a nearby bar and locked the door. When his pursuers arrived and asked him to come out, he tried to shoot the last bullet into his head. He wondered if he had really killed that man in the street; then he threw down his gun and gave himself up.

If we now ask if all the frankly reported details of P. H.'s behavior fall neatly into the initially indicated network of his unique, self-consistent life style, our answer must be affirmative.

We disagree with P. H. that he was "born" with hatred for men. This false theory would justify his attitude of irresponsibility and is a rationalization. He simply was not aware of the errors with which, since childhood, he had created his unfortunate life style.

We should have liked to question him about the circumstances in which he was so discouraged that he developed the misconceptions which prevented him from training his social interest, and drove him toward the useless side of life where we find isolation and keeping a neurotic distance from the permanent and unavoidable tasks of friendship, work, and fertile love.

We should like to know his earliest recollections for they might have shown the same dynamism from a feeling of being betrayed by men to hating and wishing to kill them. The discussion of such memories might have helped to make him understand his errors, the wrong opinion he initially formed of himself.

Of course we should wish that P. H. receive treatment from a humane psychiatrist with a concrete understanding of his patient's dynamism—instead of being delivered to an abstract, old-fashioned legal machinery. P. H. was, however, not consulting us. He is Paul Hilbert, a character created by Jean-Paul Sartre in a story entitled "Herostratus" which ends with Hilbert's surrender (11).

Theoretical Considerations

The Writer and the Psychologist

The familiar approach of psychoanalysis to characters in literature, like all of psychoanalysis, is reductionistic; that is, to uncover unconscious general principles behind the hero's actions which are un-

known to him as well as to the author. The foremost example, perhaps, is the analysis of Hamlet, cited above, whose dilemma is uncovered and explained as being due to the universal Oedipus complex. In this way, psychoanalysis truly proves itself to be an explanatory psychology, explanatory in terms of assumed heretofore hidden antecedent causes.

Adlerian psychology, in contradistinction, is an understanding psychology. This means understanding the individual in his unique style of living, or way of being, including his goal of success, which can be accomplished by seeking the coherence of all his thinking and acting. The Adlerian approach to a literary figure like Hamlet follows the same lines.[1]

Adler wanted "to leave the rich heritage of our poets and thinkers untouched. . . . The poet has created his hero so carefully and so completely that we can follow the traces of his work with cheerful collector's zeal. We must, however, warn that the charm of a work of art arises from its synthesis, whereas analysis profanes and desecrates" (4, pp. 267-268).[2] This is like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together, whereas the psychoanalytic endeavor is to expose what is presumably behind the screen events which the writer has created unawares.

Adler believed that the psychologist can actually learn from the great writers. "Our veneration for the poets can hardly reach a higher degree than in our admiration for their perfect understanding of human nature. Some day soon it will be realized that the artist is the leader of mankind on the path to the absolute truth" (3, p. 189).[3] And he adds that he has learned primarily from fairy tales, the Bible, Shakespeare, and Goethe.

On the basis of this conviction Adler considered great literary creations as the criterion against which to validate his own thinking. "We want to judge by their creations whether we are on the right path, and how much of their work we shall be able to comprehend with our working method of Individual Psychology" (4, p. 267).[2]

With the story of P. H. the present paper has attempted to show

[1]Beyond the character of Hamlet itself, the meaning for Adler of the Hamlet tragedy as a whole, as of many of Shakespeare's dramas, was "the groping for the borderline—as to when murder is permitted in our culture and when it is not permitted" (1, p. 211n).

[2]Translation modified from the German original (3, p. 192).

[3]The paragraph containing this sentence and serving as introduction to the paper on Hofrat Eysenhardt and the following paper, on Dostoevsky, is not included in the English editions.

that Adlerian psychology—derived as it is from the concrete lives of real individuals and from human nature as described by the great writers—is easily applicable to a character such as created by the great contemporary writer Sartre.

The Psychologies of Sartre and of Adler

But Sartre has the distinction of being not only a great writer. He is also an important philosopher, one of the foremost representatives of existentialism, and a psychologist in his own right. He coined the term "existential psychoanalysis" (13, p. 568) and a book of selections from his works has been published under this title (12).

As a psychological theoretician Sartre presents a concept of man which bears extensive similarity to that of Adler, as Stern (15, 16) has shown. "What Sartre shares with Adler is, among many other ideas, the finalistic conception of man, . . . and the individualization of these general human goals in each personality" (16, p. 39). Sartre's "original choice" and "fundamental project" correspond to Adler's goal and life plan. Both men emphasize the unity of the individual, his relative indeterminism and his responsibility for his choices.

The full flavor of Sartre's similarity to Adler can be well obtained from Sartre's short and very readable essay entitled "Existentialism is a Humanism" (14).[4] There we find passages such as: "We must begin from the subjective" (p. 289). "We are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better" (p. 292). " 'Man is the future of man.' . . . There is a future to be fashioned . . . but in the present one is forsaken" (p. 295). "Man will be what he makes of himself" (p. 290). "Man draws his own portrait" (p. 300). "There is no determinism—man is free" (p. 295). "Man is responsible for his passion" (p. 295). "Any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver" (p. 307). "Feeling is formed by the deeds that one does; therefore I cannot consult it as a guide to action" (p. 297). "Existentialism defines man by his action" (p. 302). "There is no love apart from the deeds of love" (p. 300). "The other is indispensible to my existence . . . we find ourselves . . . in a world . . . of 'inter-subjectivity' " (p. 303).

Sartre makes one of his most "Adlerian" statements in presenting "the *principle* of existential psychoanalysis." It is, "that man is a

[4]We should like to note that the translator of this essay is Philip Mairet (14, p. 322) who years earlier edited one of Adler's books (2), wrote the introduction to a second (10), and was the author of a book on Adler's psychology (9).

totality and not a collection. Consequently he expresses himself as a whole in even his most insignificant and his most superficial behavior" (13, p. 568). A counterpart to this is given in one of Adler's early programmatic statements. "Individual Psychology sees in every psychological process the imprint, a symbol so to speak, of the self-consistently oriented life plan" (5, p. 174).

In this context, the preceding story of P. H. serves as an illustration of how similarity in theory is reflected in similarity in "practice" —in the case of the writer, the creation of a character; in the case of the psychologist, the interpretation of a life history.

Sartre's Misunderstanding of Adler

The similarity raises the question of whether and to what extent Sartre was aware of Adler. Actually he does refer to Adler on several occasions. But apparently he never went beyond reading Adler's early works and, besides, never really did them justice. We learn from Simone de Beauvoir, life-long friend of Sartre, about the beginnings of their acquaintance with Adler. Speaking of Sartre and herself, she writes: "Freud's pansexualism struck us as having an element of madness about it, besides offending our puritanical instincts. Above all, the importance it attached to the unconscious, and the rigidity of its mechanistic theories, meant that Freudianism, as we conceived it, was bound to eradicate human free will" (7, p. 23). "Adler's book *The Neurotic Constitution* satisfied us more than the works of Freud because he attached somewhat less importance to sexual behavior . . . We criticized the psychoanalysts for pulling man to pieces rather than understanding him. The quasi-mechanical application of their key concepts allowed them to make fallacious rationalizations concerning experiences which should have been analyzed individually" (7, p. 106).[5]

We cannot fail to see the similarity between this critique of psychoanalysis and Adler's approach to works of literature quoted above. But we also see how limited the understanding of Adler on the part of Beauvoir and presumably Sartre was. This resulted in serious misunderstanding. E.g., in connection with his discussion of the inferiority complex, which he accepts, Sartre states, "It seems to us that the concept of bad faith . . . should replace those of the censor, repression, and the unconscious, which Adler uses" (13, p. 473).

[5]We are grateful to Professor J. P. Chaplin, University of Vermont, for having called these passages from Simone de Beauvoir to our attention.

Yet, each of these three concepts was rejected by Adler, not used by him. This rejection was an intrinsic part of his critique of psychoanalysis, which was very much along the same lines as Sartre's critique. Regarding censorship, Adler asked, "Does not the deeper foundation of all psychological facts asserted by Freud—e.g., the censorship of the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, narcissism, the death wish, the superego—rest altogether on the striving from below to above?" (6, p. 206). "The censor is the ego, the style of life, and creative power of each child and adult" (6, p. 206n). Compare this to Sartre's: "The censor . . . must know what it is repressing . . . must choose . . . must be aware of so doing" (13, p. 52).

Regarding repression Adler asked in his famous critique of Freud in 1911, "Is the driving factor in the neurosis the repression, or is it, as I should like to state it in neutral terms for the time being, the deviating, irritated psyche, in the examination of which repression can also be found?" (5, p. 61).

As to the unconscious, Adler admitted the concept only as an aspect of consciousness. "The unconscious is nothing other than that which we have been unable to formulate in clear concepts. It is not a matter of concepts hiding away in some unconscious . . . recesses of minds, but of parts of our consciousness, the significance of which we have not fully understood. . . . The contrast to the view of Freud . . . is clear. It is actually the compulsion toward the unity of the self, that is, the fictional goal, which dominates the extent of the conscious as well as that of the unconscious" (5, pp. 232-234).

We may then say, although he was aware of Adler and accepted some of his concepts, e.g., the inferiority complex, Sartre actually understood Adler rather poorly. Thus we may conclude, when Sartre arrived at a psychology very similar to Adler's, this was quite independent of him and can be taken as a validation of Adler's work.

SUMMARY

A literary character from Sartre was presented showing how readily it merges with principles of Adler's Individual Psychology. It serves, so to speak, as a concrete illustration of the great similarity in psychological theory between Sartre and Adler which has been noted before. Yet Sartre actually quite misunderstood Adler, so that one must conclude Sartre arrived at his important formulations independently. Sartre's writings, fictional or psychological, can therefore be taken as a validation of Adler's concepts—in the spirit in which Adler did indeed approach the creations of the great writers.

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