Individual Psychology and Logotherapy: Facing the Challenge of the 21st Century

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The evolution of dynamic psychology has been highly contradictory and uneven due in part to differences of emphasis and focus, and also due to philosophical and theoretical differences, which led to congruent and incongruent results between the respective schools. Now, especially with the new millennium, many are asking again whether in fact we should not go beyond the different schools towards a new sense of unity and purpose. Today there is a call for integration and a sense of common purpose, although how this is to be achieved is not clear. However, it has been argued that the introversion of a theory and the defence of its purity by its adherents will act as a brake on its growth and further development (John, 1998; Millar, 2000). The basis of any theory is always incomplete (Fromm, 1980) and consequently scientific progress must come as a result of open dialogue and debate for the benefit of all schools of psychology and psychotherapy. Classically, Adlerian psychology was founded upon a flexible and open-ended approach to the understanding of human nature. Orgler, for example, notes that Adler avoided offering a 'rigid scheme' that could easily be copied by physicians and therapists (Orgler, 1973, p.167). And, regarding training, Orgler writes that 'Adler demanded a thorough knowledge of other psychological schools, of philosophy and of pedagogy'(ibid, p.176).

Personality differences between the founders of dynamic psychology and intense loyalties to the 'founding fathers' are often put forward to explain the rivalries between the respective schools. However, two further aspects need to be borne in mind: the sociological conditions of the era and the actual philosophical differences whose roots we will touch upon, albeit briefly, below.

If we pause to consider the implications of the First World War and the Fascist era in the 20th century and its impact on the evolution and development of dynamic psychology, we can understand how sectarianism and extreme defensiveness arose as a response to an era of wars, civil wars, persecution and displacement (Hoffman, 1994). The need to cling to one's school and defend a canonised point of view satisfies a deep-seated need for security, certainty and identity under such conditions. An intense internal overcompensation tends, due to the imbalance created in the psyche, to be externalised into the environment. Then minor differences become exaggerated and defended as matters of principle. Excessive group attachment often leads to a threatened sense of identity when the cohesion of the group is disturbed, for example, by internal dissent or external criticism.

Defensive manoeuvres cover up the insecurity experienced in this situation (cf. John, 1998) and the result can be the subordination of scientific debate to the party line (cf. Fromm, 1963). 'We do not flatter ourselves we have explored the last and ultimate facts, nor have we voiced the last truth', wrote Adler, 'all we have attained cannot be more than part of the present knowledge and

culture. And we are looking to those coming after us' (Orgler, 1973, p.206).

In the twenty-first century the development and mutual enrichment of dynamic psychology depends upon open dialogue and debate.

Thus it is in the spirit of open dialogue that this paper reflects on the importance of Individual Psychology and Logotherapy – for the new millennium. [1]

The situation in which Adler found himself when he initiated Individual Psychology as an international movement followed from the experience of the First World War (1914-18) and the Russian (1917) and Austrian Revolutions (1918). Adler died in 1937, just before the start of the Second World War (1939-45). Nonetheless, Adler experienced the tide of reaction sweeping over Europe, and was forced to leave his beloved Vienna to save his family from persecution and death. Adler regarded the last phase of his life as devoted to establishing Individual Psychology as an international movement, reflecting his belief that the pedagogical value of his psychology might spread to help prevent war and international conflict and contribute to the foundations of a new world order. Adler was aware that a new form of social consciousness would be necessary to prevent the outbreak of another war. Although Individual Psychology was not formerly aligned to a particular party (Orgler, 1973, p.206), Adler's ideas were forged in his experience of the internationalism of Austrian Social Democracy (Hoffman, 1994). Thus, contrary to the impression that Adlerian psychology seeks the adjustment of the individual to the

established order, Adler's 'social interest' theory was linked not to 'any present –day community or society' but a future society as 'the ultimate fulfilment of evolution' (Ansbacher, 1964, p.142).

It is well known that Adler was not an armchair philosopher. Thus, the task for Individual Psychology is not only, as Marx said, 'to describe the world, but also to change it' (Way, 1950). If Adler tended to give more emphasis to the pedagogical function of Individual Psychology towards the end of his life it was because he was of a generation that had experienced the madness of war and he was aware that, with the rise of Fascism, a new world war was gathering like a storm on the horizon.

But if there is an element of a 'messianic complex' in Adler, and his adherents, it can be understood as a healthy response to the great and urgent need experienced by progressive social movements across Europe, to do everything possible to create a culture in which social injustice and war would be unthinkable. For some it may seem naïve and akin to a religious sentiment to believe in the need for a world of peace and social justice. For the Adlerian movement, however, it is an attitude to life, which combines psychological insight with a penetrating realism. Adlerian psychology exists within a specific value hierarchy that makes it the natural enemy of reactionary nationalism, dictatorship, militarism and war. It is more than a description of human nature at its best and at its worst – it is a science of human emancipation.

It is clear that Adler saw an individual's difficulties in living, not as purely intra-psychic factors, but as social problems. He refused to overlook the social context, guarding against the creation of a 'bystander psychology'. 'Asked one day by social workers whether it were worthwhile treating a man who lived in dire poverty,' Adler replied: 'If you did, it were as if you threw a text-book on the art of swimming to a drowning man. First you must help the man out of his poverty, and only then may you advise him!" (Orgler, 1973, p.205)

If Individual Psychology maintains a link with idealism and metaphysics, this is not to describe it accurately as a 'religious movement'; after all, religion involves a deity or the notion of the salvation of the soul (Adler, 1979). When encountering positivistic criticism of his 'social interest' theory, Adler retorted:

'It will, of course, be asked: How do I know that? Certainly not from my immediate experience, and I must admit that those who find an element of metaphysics in Individual Psychology are quite right… Immediate experiences never result in anything new; that is given only with the comprehensive idea that connects these facts. This idea may be called speculative or transcendental, but there is no science that does not end in metaphysics. I see no reason to be afraid of metaphysics; it has had a great influence on human life and development' (Ansbacher, 1964, p.142).

Clearly, when a movement gets stuck this is often because idolatry takes over from creative development. But perhaps we can say further that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a dialogue between psychology and religion when the common goal is the decrease of 'self-boundedness' and

the development of 'social interest' (Ansbacher, 1964, p.112).

Adler's *Social Interest – A Challenge to Mankind* (1933/1938) was a response to Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930). Adler was concerned that Freud's theory of the
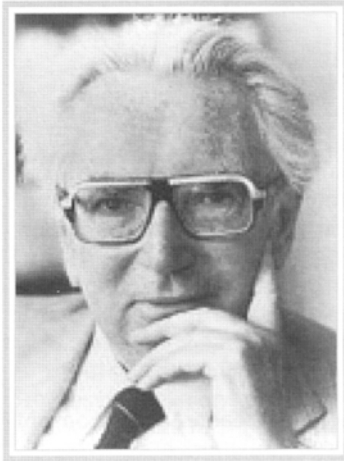
the irrational and its mastery by the Ego appeared to have succumbed to the forces it was seeking to explain and cure. As Mairet (1930) was to comment, Freud tended to see culture as a second hand substitute for something else – the sublimation of archaic instincts. But it is Adler's 'social interest' theory that contains a positive concept of social existence and mental health. Adler discovered the biological foundations of his 'social interest' theory in the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Lamarck on the one hand, and Kant and Marx on the other. Although 'admittedly the level of social interest is presently still low – ...no matter how dark the times may be, in the long-range view there is the assurance of the higher development of the individual and the group – therefore, human progress will be inevitable as long as mankind exists' (Ansbacher, 1979, p.25, 26).

Adler argues that the 'striving for perfection' is an inherent quality in human beings. There is a dynamic in human nature towards 'self-actualisation' (Ansbacher, 1964, p.124). Adler argued for an end to inequality and injurious competition as obstacles to human development. Adler argued, however, that solutions relevant to all citizens are to be found only under the conditions of the most progressive forms of democracy. Even so, human beings are not infallible. They make mistakes. They have setbacks and, as a consequence, experience profound discouragement. A close reading of Adler will show that, despite his optimism, there is nothing inevitable about human evolution. It depends upon social interest and this has to be cultivated through conscious human intervention, in the development of a humane society.

individual and civilisation served to rationalise militarism and war – as an inevitable expression of human nature – and had become reactionary. Ironically, the raison d'être of psychoanalysis – the uncovering of

This implies a struggle between civilisation and its negation. There is no ground for complacency especially after Auschwitz. If the 'simple' act of sexual reproduction were enough there would be no need for human culture. The 'is' and the 'ought' is built into human consciousness and thus the 'existential' question concerning how the future is to be lived cannot be avoided by the human sciences (cf. Adler, 1938; and Frankl, 2000).

Philosophical Roots

Whilst Adler mastered the art of expressing his ideas in key concepts and highly condensed examples, the philosophical basis of his work is complex and can only be touched upon here. Starting with Classical Greek philosophy, we find the influence of Aristotle: 'There is no realisation of the good independently of the polis, the state, society. Ethics is thus tied up with politics. The virtue of the good life requires a suitable form of social and political organisation' (Lewis, 1970, p.55). This conception permeates all of Adler's work.

Adler was profoundly influenced by Stoicism: 'The Stoics tried to equip the individual with a spiritual armament to make him invulnerable to all the slings and arrows of fortune and imperturbable amid all the chances and changes of life' (Lewis, 1970, p.62). While Freud follows in the footsteps of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Spencer, Adler follows in those of Kant and Marx (Ellenberger, 1970). 'Thus we come to a fuller understanding of Kant's conclusion,' Adler writes, 'in that we now see that reason is inseparably connected with social interest' (Ansbacher, 1964, p.149). Although Adler understood that the individual lives in a social context governed by the laws of motion of the existing society (Adler, 1957), he also stressed the pedagogical dimension in his social outlook (Hoffman, 1994, p.145). Individual Psychology, Adler hoped, would be a guiding light in growth of the individual and in the reform of society, each being inextricably linked. Thus for Adler 'socialism is deeply rooted in community feeling. It is the original sound of humanity' (Hoffman, 1994, p.125).

With the end of the First World War, Adler welcomed the opportunity to offer Individual Psychology to educators and reformers: 'Indeed, Social Democrats like Adler were not simply aiming at economic reform... they sought to create what philosopher Max Adler was calling *Neue Menschen* (new people) through youth organisations, adult education programs, lending libraries, bookstores, newspapers and magazines, theatres, festivals, and other cultural events' (Hoffman, 1994, p.125).

While Freud argued that religious sentiment is basically neurotic (Freud, 1927), Adler maintained an open dialogue with religion. Adler stressed that while Individual Psychology is manifestly humanist, rather than theistic, there are important points held in common with religion. Adler, especially after the First World War, emphasised the 'striving for perfection', the centrality of the 'social interest' theory and the need for the unification of humankind – ideals shared by the great progressive religions of East and West (cf. Adler, 1979; Fromm, 1950; Hatcher and Martin, 1985). Thus, in a debate with Max Adler, Adler said: 'Our most important job is an alliance with all forces that share our goals' (Hoffman, 1994, p.146).

For Adler, then, psychology cannot be value-free. It must be influenced, one way or another, by the personality of its founder, and reflect the values of its adherents. However, this cannot be avoided. Only naïve positivists would believe that science stands outside of society and language. This was not a problem for Adler since, as noted, he was aware of the fact that all psychology is expressive of a certain hierarchy of values. The meaning of life is like breathing, we are actualising it, 'doing it', by being alive. Philosophy is lived. For Adler, psychologists ought and must link their wagon to the project of human emancipation.

Individual Psychology and Logotherapy

It is widely assumed that Frankl's Logotherapy ('health through meaning') was formulated as a result of his experience of Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War (cf. Deurzen Smith, 1987 p.159; and Millar, 2000, p.25). In fact Frankl's 'existential analysis' was formulated mainly, in response to, and as the outcome of, his encounter with Freud and Adler, as a young medical student in late 1920s and 1930s (Frankl, 1987).

As noted above, Adler gave more emphasis to the meaning of life and the significance of the 'cosmic feeling' in his later writings, which Birnbaum shows has its parallel in Frankl's 'parareligious' attitude (Birnbaum, 1961). Frankl felt dissatisfied with the reductionism (drive gratification) he found in dynamic psychology and strove to show that human motivation is best understood in terms of the striving for 'meaning actualisation' (Frankl, 1986). Frankl was also concerned that human values should

not be defined in terms that could be easily misconstrued. For example, he objected to the idea that human worth can be adequately defined in terms of 'social usefulness'. Those persons not so defined by the existing powers in society may then experience social exclusion, injustice and oppression. Those whose contribution in the acquisitive society is measured purely in terms of monetary values are considered 'redundant' as human beings when they cease to be economically active. The acquisitive society defines 'usefulness' in terms of 'success' (power and money) and 'it adores the young' forgetting 'the values of all those who are otherwise' (Frankl, 1984, p.176). The link between Adler and Frankl here is their humanism and critique of capitalism.

As noted above, for Freud, religion is a neurosis. However, for Adler, religion contains important psychological and moral insights. For Frankl, modern science is linked to technology and materialism in a positivistic fashion. Its inauthentic separation of 'fact' and 'value' is injurious to the human spirit. For Frankl, it is the estrangement of religion and science that masks the crisis of values in the acquisitive society. In short, psychological health cannot be separated from a psychology of moral evolution. 'What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. Logos is deeper than logic' (Frankl, 1984, p.141). This does not necessarily involve the acceptance of a theistic viewpoint, but it does mean that we are confronted with the reality of ethical concerns and moral conflicts (cf. Fromm, 1950). The 'is' and the 'ought' of human life

represents an existential conflict that science has attempted to ignore at the cost of the psychological and impoverishment of the individual and society. Frankl was aware of the disastrous divorce between philosophy, psychology and psychiatry, and maintained a dialogue with religion because the latter retains the link to this important notion of a meaning and purpose in human nature. Thus Individual Psychology and Logotherapy find common ground in Stoicism, Judaeo-Christian culture, Renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, and particularly (though not exclusively) Spinoza's philosophy - with reference to the problem suffering, courage and the purpose of life.

For Frankl, the acquisitive society is based upon hedonism. The pursuit of pleasure is then the meaning of life. However, by ignoring the categorical imperative of the existential, or ethical, dimension of human life, hedonism tends to end in nihilism and despair. Frankl thus concurred with Stoicism that hedonism leads to an attitude of deep disappointment with life because of the tragic dimension of human existence: pleasure is an aspect of life, but so also is suffering. Frankl's own life experience reinforced his philosophical critique of hedonism. If the meaning of life is the pleasure principle how could this be of help in the concentration camp where the basis of even a rudimentary sense of happiness through pleasure was all but eliminated? Besides, what mattered most was a sense of identity and a purpose in surviving.

For the Stoic, Seneca, 'the affirmation of one's essential being is spite of desires and anxieties creates joy. Joy

accompanies the self-affirmation of our essential being in spite of the inhibitions coming from the accidental elements in us. Joy is the emotional expression of the courageous Yes to one's own true being' (Tillich, 1962, p.25).

Frankl gives more emphasis in his writings to the experience of suffering

> In a goal of work or accomplishment, in devotion to a person or a cause, in facing one's unalterable fate with courage and fortitude, one discovers meaning

and despair, the 'tragic triad of pain, guilt and death which may be turned into something positive and creative' (Frankl, 1985, p.125).

In his struggle to transcend the suffering encountered in the Nazi concentration camps, Frankl writes: 'I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: the salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in the world may still know bliss. In utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only

achievement may consist in enduring his suffering in the right way, man can achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory"'(Frankl, 1984, p.57).

Thus Logotherapy involves self-transcendence through the actualisation of creative values, experiential values and attitudinal values. In a goal of work or accomplishment, in devotion to a person or a cause, in facing one's unalterable fate with courage and fortitude, one discovers meaning. Thus Frankl's idea of 'self-realisation' concurs with Adler's 'social interest' theory (Ansbacher, 1964, p.112).

Both Adler's and Frankl's respective approaches to 'self-realisation' are rooted in the philosophy of Spinoza: In his discussion of courage and self-affirmation 'Spinoza uses two terms, *fortitudo* and *animositas*. *Fortitudo* is the strength of the soul, its power to be what it essentially is. *Animositas*, derived from *anima,* is courage in the sense of a total act of the person. But Spinoza distinguishes between *animositas* and *generositas,* the desire to join other people in friendship and support. Perfect self-affirmation is not an isolated act which originates in the individual being but is participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation' (Tillich, 1962, p.32, 33).

In Frankl's Logotherapy the emphasis is on *fortitudo* and *animositas*. Adler's psychology is influenced by this set of ideas but emphasises the importance of *generositas* – 'participation in the universal or divine act of self-affirmation' - albeit in humanistic terminology - as: 'social interest'.

Mono-anthropism and Postmodernism

The influence of Spinoza and Kant on the link between Individual Psychology and ethics has already been noted. Recently, G. Frankl has shown how Kant's notion of the innate basis of morality is reflected in recent findings of neuropsychology (Frankl, 2000), thus supporting the 'social interest' theory of Individual Psychology. Whilst Frankl's Logotherapy is influenced by the theistic humanism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, Adler's philosophy draws more heavily from secular trends in these same philosophical movements. Both, however, uphold the ideas of reason and progress (Fabry, 1995), and thus belief in the ability of human beings to transcend themselves and their conditions of living.

The loss of faith in reason and progress in the late twentieth century has been expressed in 'postmodernism' as a trend in philosophy and the social sciences. The 'postmodernist' movement expresses disillusionment in the progressive ideals of the material and intellectual culture of Western civilisation (Callinicos, 1989). Thus this 'postmodernist' rebellion poses as the new 'radicalism', yet it ultimately represents a rather uncomfortable return to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (Habermas, 1987).

'Postmodernism' celebrates 'difference' and the 'freedom' as an assertion of the individual against tradition and any form of normative expectations (Jameson, 1991). However, arguably, this ideology dovetails with the era of corporate capitalism (cf. Mandel, 1975, Jameson, 1991). In the age when the Enlightenment has been turned on its head, short-term hedonism and cynicism, issuing in subjectivism and moral relativism, appear as essential components of the culture of narcissism (Frankl, 2000). Thus 'postmodernism' focuses on the negative side of Nietzsche's philosophy which denies 'the existence of causality, natural laws, and the possibility of man reaching any truth, a conclusion expressed in one of his aphorisms: "Nothing is true, everything is allowed!"' (Ellenberger, 1970, p.272). Thus, in its more recent guise, 'postmodernism' is an expression of the despair and moral nihilism of a generation of post- Second World War intellectuals (Callinicos, 1989).

Frankl taught that psychological health depends upon the individual discovering a task to fulfil, a purpose and a future orientated goal. Later, he emphasised 'that this is not only true of the survival of individuals but also holds for the survival of mankind' (Frankl, 1985, p.140). Faced with the uncertainties and instability of the acquisitive society, an 'existential vacuum' is created (Frankl, 1985). When this existential vacuum opens up people experience a sense of dislocation, meaninglessness and isolation. The insecurity and despair becomes intolerable as the traditional norms and values break down and fragment. The need for security and a sense of identity in human beings becomes an urgent one. In this contemporary period reactionary nationalism and tribal ethnic mythologies appear once again – as

in the 1920s and 1930s - as 'attractive' but false solutions. 'Postmodernism' recognises that civilisation is in crisis but, fixated in a stance of infantile rebellion, retreats into an impasse. Adherents of this ideology forget that new problems demand new solutions and these can be achieved on the basis of a qualitative leap in the cooperation of humankind. However, the idea of universals is not to be confused with an enforced homogeneity – they are core values of peace, security, sustainable development, human rights, democracy and social justice – achievable only on the basis of global cooperation. The psychological and physical survival of human beings depends upon these universal values in the new millennium. 'What we need is not only the belief in one God', Frankl argues, 'but also the awareness of the one mankind, the awareness of the unity of humanity – mono-anthropism' (Frankl, 1985 p.140).

Despite differences of terminology and emphasis Individual Psychology and Logotherapy have a common psychological and pedagogical position. While Adler's Individual Psychology has a scientific-humanistic outlook, it does share certain values in its 'social interest' theory with progressive monotheists, the crowning vision being the unity in diversity of humankind. 'There is survival value', Frankl says, 'in the will to meaning, as we have seen; but as to mankind, there is hope for survival only if mankind is united by a common will to common tasks' (Frankl, 1985, p.140).

Both Adler and Frankl share similar philosophical antecedents though different trends are expressed in their respective work Adler focuses on the relationship between the individual and society. Frankl's focus is on the possibility of discovering meaning in the world and on the attainment of inner compensations in the face of unavoidable suffering. Both share the idea of self-transcendence as the basis of self-actualisation and of the progressive unity of humankind.

Thus the task of individual and social psychologists, interested in the welfare of humankind in the twenty-first century, is to encourage the men and women of today and tomorrow to find new solutions to new problems, to discover 'a common will to common tasks', to generate a 'mono-anthropist' consciousness, and thus clear a pathway through the rubble of the past to meet the challenges of our new century on the basis of global co-operation, equality and social justice.

(1) An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Adlerian Society (UK) at Conway Hall, London, January 2000, and was published in the Adlerian Yearbook (UK) 2001.

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