Alfred Adler and Trends in Neo-Adlerian Psychology

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Still by far the best overall account of Adler's Individual Psychology can be found in Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970). Invariably, most accounts of the origins and evolution of dynamic psychology is still marred by the polemic and the rivalry between the two Viennese founding fathers of modern psychotherapy. It is perhaps to be expected that, due to the personalities of Freud and Adler on the one hand, and their powerfully different conceptions of human nature on the other, such differences have been reproduced from one generation of adherents to the next. Of course, these two rival schools were competing not just for influence, but also for survival as refugees following the rise of fascism in Germany and Austria between 1933 and 1938 (Hoffman: 1994).

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Unlike Freud who, for various reasons, stayed in Vienna until the last moments of his family's survival in face of the Nazi threat, Adler had been appointed to Long Island Medical School in 1928, and spent his summers propagating his school of Individual Psychology (IP) in the USA. When the counter-revolution in Vienna held sway in 1934/35 with the Dollfuss –Schuschnigg Chancellorships, and Adler's wife was arrested, the condition for her release was that the Adler family left the country.

Settling in New York, Adler's son, Kurt, and daughter, Alexandra, qualified in psychiatry and psychology, and established the Adler Institute in the city. Adler died in Scotland during a lecture tour in 1937. He saw the dark clouds of the Second World War approaching and hoped to salvage as much as he could of the international movement he and his co-workers had created as a contribution to a new world.

Much has been written about the 'domestication' or 'medicalisation' of psychoanalysis in the USA. Freud wrote in defence of non-medical analysts in his *Lay Analysis* (1926). Some psychoanalysts were required by the American authorities to re-sit their examinations work as medical doctors, for example, Karen Horney, and Otto Fenichel. Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm were expelled from the International Association for Psychoanalysis due to their anti-fascist connections, but were able to re-establish themselves in the USA.

However, the effects of emigration (having the experience of being refugees in a new language and culture) on the adherents of IP, is less well documented. Hoffman's recent biography of Adler (1994) offers more insight into the later years of Adler's life and times as part of the intellectual migration to the USA. It is well known that Freud was not keen on American society. American culture was viewed as too shallow, far too pragmatic and money-oriented for psychoanalysis to flourish. Instead the Americans would adapt psychoanalysis as an adjunct to the medical profession. Freud and Adler viewed their work in a broader perspective, as part of the human sciences, and did not want it to become restricted to medical practitioners. However, while Freud tended to take an élitist attitude to American culture, Adler was more in touch with the democratic tradition in America and felt more optimistic about the prospects for IP in American society (Hoffman: 1994).

Adler's influence was perhaps at its peak in his own lifetime, but the revival of interest developed in large measure due to the work of Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher who annotated and edited three books of Adler's writings. They demonstrated the influence of Adler's work on ego psychology and existential psychology, and in anticipating the so-called 'neo-Freudian,' or interpersonal school, of Erich Fromm, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Karen Horney. One could also mention the influence of Adler's psychology on cognitive-behavioural therapy (Beck and Ellis), Kelly's Personal Construct Therapy, Berne's Transactional Analysis, and more recent innovations such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Furthermore, one could

mention the similarities between Adler's IP and Heinz Kohut's Self Psychology.

Although considered too 'analytic' by some adherents of the Humanistic Psychology movement, it is interesting to note that Maslow himself was a student of Adlerian psychology all of his life, and Adler was one of his more significant, and early, mentors (Hoffman: 1994).

There is not adequate space to give a full account of the trends within the Adlerian movement here, but I shall attempt to indicate the general context, the underlying dynamics and the real issues at stake.

Following the calamity of the Second World War, the Adlerian movement was gradually re-established in Europe, for example, in Austria, Germany, Holland, France, Italy, and England. In the USA the Adlerian movement developed into three main centres: New York, San Francisco, and Chicago. The New York and San Francisco Institutes followed more closely in the theory, philosophy and treatment methods of Adler, Kurt Adler, Alexandra Adler, and the Ansbachers; Sophia de Vries, Lydia Sicher, Alexander Mueller, and Henry Stein. The Chicago Adler Institute was established by Rudolph Dreikurs: Dreikurs was also a refugee from Vienna, a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, who trained psychiatrists and psychologists such as Bernard Shulman, Don Dinkmeyer, Don Dinkmeyer Jr, Len Sperry, and Loren Grey.

If we look at Dreikurs's work, one notices quite a different interpretation of Adlerian psychology and treatment methods. Driekurs focuses much more on 'belonging,' which is seen as man's primary drive, or need (Dreikurs: 1973). Now, while this concept is definitely to be found in Adlerian psychology, and an interesting parallel can be drawn here between IP and attachment -based psychoanalytic psychology (John Bowlby), it has been cited as demonstrating the conformist implications of Adlerian psychology. The emphasis on adaptation in Dreikurs' work may also have been due to the fact that Driekurs was himself painfully aware of being a refugee and an immigrant in a foreign language and culture, and he was certainly aware of how difficult it was for Adlerian psychologists to establish themselves in a predominantly hostile psychoanalytic environment. Hoffman (1994) mentions that Driekurs' occasionally abrasive personality had already been observed in the Viennese Society for Individual Psychology, predating his refugee status in the USA, and Loren Grey notes that Driekurs' charismatic-authoritarian traits helped to alienate potential allies and this helped to entrench the schism that developed between Dreikurs and the 'classical' Adlerians (Cf. Grey: 1998).

Grey, trained by Dreikurs, writes as though Adler had never developed the pedagogic side of IP, as though IP Societies and counselling centres for teachers, parents and children, had not been established in Vienna, and other European cities in the 1920s and early 1930s. Possibly as an expression of the schism in the Adlerian movement, Grey refers to the 'First Adlerian International Conference held in Eugene, Oregon 1963' (presumably

an initiative of the Dreikurs' organisation), a rather myopic notion because the First International Congress of IP was in fact held in Munich in 1922.

The textbook by Dinkmeyer, et al (1987), and the more detailed exposition of Adlerian psychology offered by Oberst and Stewart (2003), follows the Dreikursian four-stage model of psychotherapy and pedagogy. Here, Adlerian philosophy and psychotherapy is systematised, highly structured and severely truncated. Adler's philosophy, treatment methods and pedagogical principles tend to be reduced to neat formulas to be easily taught and propagated (cf. Grey: 1998, p.129). Further, it has been convincingly argued that Dreikurs' sarcasm and authoritarian tendencies prevented creative opposition, thus it is surprising that Driekurs is described as a more effective leader (than Adler). Grey also suggests Dreikurs was the first to apply Adlerian psychology in the classroom, forgetting that Adlerians had not only already influenced the school system in Vienna in the 1920s but also established an experimental school along Adlerian lines (Cf. Ganz: 1953). If we look at the Adlerian movement today, we can observe that the Dreikurs branch of IP distinguishes itself not just in theory and practice but also organisationally.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note Grey's remarkably objective summary of the schism and its impact on theory and practice:

'Though the type of diagnostic procedures that were developed by Adler and Dreikurs have been seen as important tools in the training of potential therapists and counsellors, a considerable amount of controversy exists even among Adlerians today with regard to their use by less experienced therapists and trainees. The controversy was particularly heated in the 1940s and 1950s between the early Adlerians such as Lydia Sicher, Alexandra and Kurt Adler, and supporters of the approaches utilised by Driekurs and his followers. The early Adlerians had consistently maintained that the type of structuring Dreikurs had proposed for diagnosis and therapy tended to oversimplify the dynamics and lead to misconceptions concerning a person's lifestyle in the process. The main reason for this objection was that although the initial principles of Adlerian theory needed to be observed, investigation into the personality was a distinctly individual process for each person.' (Grey:1998, p.89)

Thus, at this juncture, it is worth noting Hertha Orgler's comment that 'IP has no strict rules; it offers only directions and advice for the psychotherapist to apply according to each patient… Adler was careful not to set up a rigid scheme' (Orgler: 1973, p. 167).

In their work Henry Stein and Martha Edwards (1998) of Adler Institute of San Francisco and North Western Washington offer a rich picture of the theory and practice of classical Adlerian psychology. In contrast to the formulas and didactic textbooks of Dreikurs, one finds the more open-ended, creative approach based on the humanistic philosophy of Adler. The focus is on 'social interest' or 'social feeling' as an expression not of 'fitting-in' or 'belonging' but as an expression of 'self-actualisation.'

The process of psychotherapy is described as having at least twelve stages. However, Stein emphasises again that it is not a 'painting by numbers approach' and that classical Adlerians are trained to cut the therapeutic cloth according to the needs of each individual client/patient. Moreover, Stein emphasises the Socratic dimension in Adlerian psychotherapy: a respectful, participatory, reflective, insightful, challengingly constructive and educative process whereby the specific needs of the client can be identified, the developmental deficit addressed, the healing process made possible, and the life -philosophy of the client renewed.

Thus it can be argued that while Dreikurs emphasised 'belonging' as the primary need of the human being (Dreikurs: 1973, p.6; p.71), classical Adlerians tend to emphasise the striving for significance, the overcoming of obstacles, and self-actualisation through social feeling. Thus, *if the 'need to belong' and conforming to the rules of the group become tantamount to 'social interest' individuation is lost sight of and even tends to be invalidated*. Although I doubt whether Dreikurs consciously intended this to be the outcome of his attempt to codify and teach his own interpretation of IP to trainees, parents and teachers, this formulation nonetheless cancels the humanistic basis of IP and may even represents a contradiction in his own work.

Thus to be fair, Dreikurs also speaks of the need for social equality and the art of being oneself. For example, in a memorable passage, he writes of the need for the individual to retain his 'inner freedom' against the demands of a competitive, conformist society:

'Everybody likes approval; but the free man, sure of his own value, does not depend on it. Our patients need to learn this inner freedom, of which Adler constantly spoke when he advised his students not to have a personal stake in whatever they may be doing. If it turns out well, so much the better; but if it does not, we must go on. If we feel defeated, our ability to go on becomes greatly impaired; but nobody can make us feel defeated except we ourselves. The failure to accomplish what we wanted can be an important experience and part of the learning process. But this requires that we do not take it as an expression of our lack of our personal worth or ability. What we may do may be wrong, stupid, or mistaken; but this does not mean that we are stupid or a failure. Society does not teach us this lesson yet; psychotherapy cannot proceed without teaching it.' (Dreikurs: 1973, p.44)

However, it can be argued that the Socratic-democratic dimension of the Adlerian philosophy and therapeutic approach tends to be forgotten by Dreikurs. In its place a more formalised, structured and didactic approach is adopted. As noted, the need to 'belong' is emphasised as the central goal of human motivation, leaving room for misunderstanding if 'social interest' (self-actualisation) is equated with conforming to existing capitalistic-bureaucratic society.

It is interesting to note, however, that in their more recent textbook Dinkmeyer, et al, (1987) give more equal attention to the striving for a 'unique identity,' as the 'master motive' of human activity, as well as the 'need to belong' (1987: p.10; p.16).

The idea that the schism in the IP movement can be understood in terms of a 'Europe versus America' division is not justified. This juxtaposition cannot be maintained because it does not deal with the complexity of the facts and issues involved.

'... because of Alfred Adler's impassioned ideals as a democratic socialist, he was often the target of politically-motivated ideological attacks that maligned his psychological approach.' (Hoffman: 1994, p.xii).

Thus what is understandable, and more likely, is that Adler tended to downplay his socialist beliefs at a time when he was trying to rescue himself and his family from fascist persecution in Austria. It may also be noted that in Austria, following the Revolution of 1918, the Adlerian movement was radicalised and made a varied and rich contribution to the attempt to build a democratic socialist society in Vienna (Hoffman: 1994). However, with the crushing of the Austrian workers' movement and its demoralisation, following the events of 1934/35 and the Nazi invasion in 1938, the fate of the Adlerian psychology movement and other democratic and progressive movements, was sealed.

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It can be argued that Driekurs' simplified approach to IP has given rise to the impression in some quarters that the goal of Adlerian psychology is the adjustment of the individual to society - in sharp contrast to the humanistic philosophy of Adler and his followers. This mistaken interpretation of IP has been expressed in countless books and articles since Adler broke with Freud in 1911, and has been repeated in textbooks in psychoanalytic studies in recent years.

Perhaps, unwittingly, Oberst and Stewart (2003) have also served to de-radicalise Adler's life and work when they mistakenly deny that Adler was a socialist (2003: p. 2), forgetting that Adler's socialism is an expression of humanism. Thus Kurt Adler reaffirmed only quite recently that at the end of his life his father did not change, and that

As the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939, the centre of the Adlerian movement shifted to the USA. As noted, in Europe after the war, Adlerian Institutes and training centres were gradually re-established. IP Societies are also active in Asia. Also noted, Henry Stein and his co-workers have built upon the classical Adlerian tradition, integrating the work of Abraham Maslow on personality and

motivation (which can be seen as a development of IP theory) with the contributions of Adler's original students.

The existential analysis of Viktor Frankl carries with it many aspects of Adlerian psychology and focuses on the striving for significance, or meaning, and its therapeutic and pedagogical implications for the individual and society. Like Adler, Frankl argues that the aim of healthy human striving is happiness, not pleasure (a perspective that the British psychoanalysts Suttie, Bowlby, Fairbairn, Guntrip, and Winnicott were later to share with IP).

Finally, the work of Karen Horney and Erich Fromm can also be viewed as important developments of Adlerian psychology. Horney has broadened the analysis and discussion of 'neurotic trends' and developed the concept of a 'growth-oriented' psychology and therapy, although in her work she has tended to down-play the importance of developmental factors. Fromm's 'humanistic psychoanalysis' – sharing a common theoretical basis with IP - has developed and deepened our understanding of alienation, and how it can be overcome, in the advanced technological societies.

Conclusion

Recent developments: Henry Stein and his co-workers are busy preparing and publishing *The Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler,* as part of the translation project of the Adler Institute of San Francisco and Washington. This initiative represents a major contribution to Adlerian studies, being a much overdue and necessary corrective to the neglect of IP by historians of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in the twentieth century.

It is probable that certain psychodynamics were involved in the way in which Rudolph Dreikurs unconsciously expressed his desire to be the 'preferred son,' the interpreter of the 'real tradition', in competition perhaps with Kurt and Alexandra Adler. The healing of neurotic differences in organisations is possible with the application of aphorism 'physician heal thyself.' To be sure, the concept of sibling rivalry is, after all, a key contribution of IP, and so, also, is the inferiority complex, which blocks, inhibits, and distorts the development of social interest (psychological health), obstructing the achievement of the central scientific and philosophical aim of the IP movement itself: 'unity in diversity'.

IP aims, however, not just for the removal of symptoms, but also for the transformation of personality; and thereby society itself, by the formation of the democratic character-structure (H. Stein).

Thus Adler's IP is rooted in humanist philosophy: it defends the health and growth of the individual against all conditions which serve to undermine his or her value, integrity, and dignity as a human being; and his, or her, ability to achieve a worthwhile and meaningful adjustment *not to society as it is, but to a society that is worthy of him* (Adler, *Religion and IP*, in, Ansbacher & Ansbacher: 1979, p.305. Wexberg: 1929).