

ignated hitter or not? Have relief pitchers radically changed the nature of batting averages? A far less useful approach to evaluating baseball might be to criticize it for not having enough touchdowns. A system should be evaluated—and hence criticized—based upon the integrity of its system and assumptions, not upon another set of assumptions. “Drives,” a basic assumption of classical psychoanalysis, are *not* part of the assumptions of Individual Psychology. Similarly, striving for superiority is a key assumption of Adler’s theory but has little direct relevance to Freud’s system. “Don’t,” the old saying states, “confuse apples with oranges.”

□ The Basic Assumptions of Individual Psychology

In Chapter 1, we explored the “style of life” of Adler and how his background influenced the development of the person (Mosak & Kopp, 1973). Adler astutely noted that a system, or theory, frequently has a life style of its own (Adler, 1931/1964b). That style reflects the personality of its originator and those who are attracted to it. What is about to be discussed is the life style of a theory—the underlying “schemas” that organize its structure.

Holism

Adlerians postulate that the person is an indivisible unit, that the person needs to be understood in his or her totality. From this vantage point, dividing the person into id, ego, and superego, or parent, child, and adult states, is not beneficial. As Adler (1956) stated:

Very early in my work, I found man to be a [self-consistent] unity. The foremost task of Individual Psychology is to prove this unity in each individual—in his thinking, feeling, acting, in his so-called conscious and unconscious, in every expression of his personality. (p. 175)

What exactly is holism? In more concrete terms, holism can be conceptualized in the following ways.

The whole is *different* than the sum of its parts (Smuts, 1926/1961). For instance, imagine three parallel lines of equal length. In their present configuration, one “sees” one pattern; these same three lines can be reconfigured to form an equilateral triangle or the letter N or the letter Z and other configurations. One must know the *Gestalt* in order to understand the particular item, for in each case, we have three lines of equal length. If we focus too exclusively upon the parts, we lose the

Gestalt and, hence, we may “miss the boat.” We do not see the forest for the trees.

Similarly, to allude to the opening quote of this chapter from Nietzsche, to say “the arm moves” is to assign to “it” (i.e., the arm) a “mind” and “will” of its own. “I raised my arm” is a very different statement philosophically than “my arm rose.” The first statement awards responsibility to the person; the latter gives responsibility to the arm. Hence, Freud’s emphasis upon drives and instincts originating from the id raised all sorts of “sticky” issues with regard to personal responsibility. Who, if anybody, was responsible for directing the instincts? If they “directed themselves,” as Freud typically implied, that meant they had to have some sort of “ego-functions,” a point Adler (1956) duly noted and called into question during his early days as a psychoanalyst.

Finally, as we demonstrate in our teaching, imagine this: For a moment, hold your hands out in front of your chest, with elbows bent, hands close to your body, and hold your hands. Now, pull. Notice something? Your hands, to paraphrase Nietzsche, stay dead center. No matter how hard you pull, with your left hand pulling left, right hand pulling right, they stay center. Why? Because you *choose* to keep them there. As long as we conceptualize the “hands”—that is, the parts—as being the focus of our attention, we formulate the idea of internal conflict or intrapsychic conflict with the person expressing him- or herself as a victim of the conflict (Mosak & LeFevre, 1976). Actually, we have *decided* to keep our hands “in conflict.” Rather than victims of conflict, we are creators of conflict. The conflict is only apparent from an atomistic, reductionistic perspective (a different set of assumptions). From a holistic perspective, the hands are not in conflict with each other because “they” are exhibiting equal force in opposing directions; the hands stay dead center because we have decided to keep them there by exerting equal force. Conflict is a decision not to make a decision, to stay “dead center.” The “pain” we feel is the price we pay for not making the decision (and perhaps “look good” to ourselves and others). If you “allow” one hand to pull harder (i.e., if you make a decision), notice how easily they move.

Teleology

Given this emphasis upon holism, and the fact the “intrapsychic conflict,” or conflict that is related to a reductionistic perspective, is a function of choice, why would one choose to remain “in conflict?” It serves a purpose. In Aristotle’s work, *The Metaphysics* (350 BC/1941), this is referred to as the final cause. Aristotle delineated four causes and believed

that in order to understand the nature of something (i.e., anything), we must know the:

- Material cause—what it is made of
- Efficient cause—how it came to be
- Formal cause—what shape or essence it is
- Final cause—for what sake, or purpose, it is

A clinical example clarifies. A woman is depressed:

Material cause: A sad presentation, with lethargy, diurnal variation, psychomotor retardation.

Efficient cause: She may have a biological vulnerability she inherited. She suffered a loss in childhood of a parent. Her husband has just left her.

Formal cause: A mood (affective) disorder. She dislikes it and it causes suffering to herself and those around her. She complains and feels “horrible” and is self-critical.

Final cause: It places others into her service. With it, she can get others to move toward her and allow her to seek revenge upon her husband (“Look how that bastard has ruined my life!”).

The various “schools” of psychotherapy have emphasized different causes. The first three causes (the material, efficient, and formal) are well known, at least in applications, to most clinicians. Adler’s emphasis was upon the fourth, the final, cause. To emphasize any one to the exclusion of the others would be reductionistic, and Adlerian psychology is holistic; we stress all four causes, particularly the final cause (Ansbacher, 1951).

As Adler (1927/1957) wrote, the “first thing we discover in the psychic trends is that the movements are directed toward a goalThis teleology, this striving for a goal, is innate in the concept of adaptation” (p. 28). In order to understand a person’s goal, we need to understand his or her line of movement. People move towards goals in various ways; the most common goal is to belong. The importance of belonging is stressed by Horney (1950) in one of her central concepts, that of “basic anxiety,” which she defines as “the feeling of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world” (p. 18). All of us want to belong, and we establish a final, fictional goal that directs us as to what we should be or accomplish in order to belong (Adler, 1956). Goals are generally differentiated along two dimensions: concrete versus fictional, and long-range versus short-range. Fictional goals are subjective and state what must be achieved—fame, power, perfection, money, sexual attractiveness, performance, conquest, or so forth—in order to have a place in life. Because one can achieve significance in other ways, these goals are fictional.

An example clarifies the matter. Carl establishes early during his development (see Chapter 3) that the way for him to “fit in,” to bond with his family, is to be “the best.” This is unarticulated—it is learned preverbally (Rogers, 1951). To be the best is a “fictional goal.” It becomes concretized in many diverse ways, such as to be the smartest student, the swiftest runner, the most popular classmate, and so forth. Even the concrete, “tangible” manifestations can be further broken down. If his long-term goal is to be the number-one student, many short-term goals can be envisioned: to study hard, to be “teacher’s pet,” or to have no one answer more questions than he does when in class. The final, fictional goal, therefore, can have many permutations and components. Also, there can be more than one final fictional goal (Mosak, 1979). Carl may want to be the best *and* he may crave excitement as well. The competition to be number one is certainly important, but the feelings of excitement and the thrill of competing may be “addictive” for him as well. This second final, fictional goal can have the same kind of permutations and variations mentioned about being the best.

To return to the issue from the beginning of this section, why would someone choose to be “in conflict?” What purpose could that serve? A more complete discussion is presented in the chapters on inferiority complexes and psychopathology, but for present purposes, a brief rationale can be offered. Sometimes, it seems beneficial “not to move,” to “stay put” (Mosak & LeFevre, 1976). A man who cannot decide between his wife and his mistress can be conceptualized as in conflict. The purpose: As long as he “cannot” choose, he keeps both. If he “suffers” enough, they feel sorry for him and continue to wait for his decision. It is apparent that not to decide is to make a choice.

The Creative Self

Adlerians view people as actors, not merely reactors. We are more than the product of heredity and environment, more than simply reactive organisms; as Mahoney (1991) has stated, the prevailing trend in the social sciences is to see individuals as actively constructing their experiences, not simply passively responding to what is presented.

Adlerian psychology has been erroneously characterized as one that advocates merely reactive adjustment to society. Adler (1933/1964f), to the contrary, indicated that if we do not live in a suitable societal situation, we have the obligation to change it.

Adler (1929b, p. 34) noted that the child “strives to develop, and it [the child] strives to develop along a line of direction fixed by the goal which it chooses for itself.” Although heredity and environment do pro-

vide parameters (see subsequent discussion of “soft determinism”), they do not take into account how the person will perceive his or her heredity or background.

Two processes are worth noting: feedback and feedforward mechanisms. Feedback mechanisms are (generally) homeostatic in function; they interpret data and determine what adjustments need to be made in order to maintain the status quo or adjust accordingly. Feedforward mechanisms are proactive; they anticipate and modify the situation in order to produce feedback that is already in line with the organism’s requirements. The creativity we speak of is related to feedforward mechanisms. Children, for example, not only passively receive input from their caregivers, but actively elicit responses from those same individuals (Mosak, 1980). Similarly, anyone can be victimized; life can, and does, “kick us in the teeth” on occasion. Whether or not one chooses to become a victim, however, is not so automatic. As Frankl (1983) has discussed, life challenges us, but the *meaning* we derive from life is up to us. Life deals the cards; we only get a chance to play the hand.

Soft Determinism

This assumption becomes evident at this point. The classic philosophical debate has been between determinism and nondeterminism. The former assumes that causality (in the sense Nietzsche referred to at the opening of this chapter) is a fact, and that A implies (leads to) B. Nondeterminism assumes no causal connections whatsoever. Soft determinism is the middle ground. It stresses influences, not causes, and speaks of probabilities and possibilities, not givens. According to Adler (1933/1964f), the givens of a person’s life situation and biologic constitution “are events of statistical probability. The evidence of their existence should never be allowed to degenerate into the setting up of a fixed rule” (p. 27). As Adler (1936) was fond of pointing out, “Everything can also be different” (p. 14).

Several clarifications need to be made, for the subtle distinctions of this issue have fostered considerable misunderstandings, even among Adlerians. First, choosing does *not* always mean wanting. I may choose a broken leg, even though I do not want it, if it means jumping from this burning building in order to save my life. Similarly, one may choose to go to graduate school to get one’s doctorate, but one may not want to have to do all the work and read all the texts.

Second, freedom to choose *is not the same* as freedom of choice. Life does impose certain limits, and within those limits I am free to choose. Freedom of choice typically implies unlimited choice. That rarely exists. Nonetheless, we are always free to choose, at least how we feel about

what is presented, in other words, our attitude (see Frankl, 1983, for a cogent discussion of this topic).

Third, the dynamics of responsibility, choice, and blame need to be explored. Although Adlerians hold them responsible for their actions (Maniacci, 1991; Mosak, 1987a), they do not blame people. Given the assumptions of holism, creativity, teleology, and soft determinism, people choose; they, and they alone, are responsible for their choices. They may not be aware of making the choices or of the consequences of their choices and many of the implications that those choices entail, particularly the social implications, but they are responsible for them. Adlerians do not believe that “the Devil made me do it.” People are not to be blamed but to be educated, and Adler (1956) considered his therapy to be strongly reeducative (see the discussion of this issue by Ford & Urban, 1963; and Mosak, 1995a).

Phenomenology

“I am convinced,” Adler (1933/1964f, p. 19) stated unequivocally, “that a person’s behavior springs from his idea . . . because our senses do not receive actual facts, but merely a subjective image of them.” Technically speaking, we do not see the world, we apprehend it. Adler (1956, p. 182) spoke of a “schema of apperception [*Apperzeptionsschema*].” An apperception is a perception with meaning, a conclusion, attached to it. Whereas Freud operated from the premise (vantage point) of an objective psychologist, Adler was a subjective psychologist (Ford & Urban, 1963). Adler was not interested in facts per se, but the individual’s perceptions of the facts.

The cognitive map we form to guide us through life, to direct our line of movement toward our final, fictional goal, is based upon our phenomenological interpretation of experience (Mosak, 1995a). A story clarifies:

A child turns to his father and asks, “Which is closer, the moon or China?” His father, being a man who values logic, replies, “China.” The child forcefully disagrees. Upon questioning, the child explains that the moon must be closer, because he can see the moon, and he’s never seen China.

An interesting historical note is in order. It is generally considered that the founder of the “school” of phenomenology was the mathematician/philosopher Edmund Husserl, who first detailed his system in his book, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913/1962). Adler was writing at the same time and had published his book *The Neurotic Constitution* a year earlier (1912/1983b). Though it is not commonly

known, Husserl was a classmate of Freud; the only nonmedical course Freud took at the University of Vienna was from Franz Brentano, Husserl's mentor. Husserl's "star pupil" was a young theology student who switched to philosophy, Martin Heidegger, the founder of the school of existentialism. The phenomenological method is the cornerstone of existential psychology (Yalom, 1980), and one of the key assumptions of Individual Psychology (Allers, 1961; van Dusen, 1959). The interrelatedness of the two schools has been well documented (Ansbacher, 1959a; Birnbaum, 1961; Ellenberger, 1970; Farau, 1964; Holt, 1967; Johnson, 1966; Radl, 1959; Schaffer, 1974, 1976; Stern, 1958; van Dusen, 1959).

If the person is continually acting on, and not simply reacting to, his or her environment, and that person is actively creating his or her own perceptions, goals, and movements through life, then the Adlerian conception sees development as an ongoing process; the person is continually creating (or recreating) him- or herself. He or she is always in the process of becoming (K. Adler, 1963; Allport, 1955). As is evident in Chapter 4, the influences, not causes, from the past may have had phenomenological reality for us, but conditions do change, and we have the capacity to change with them. We may have "had to," from our phenomenological reality, react a certain way "back then," but if the situation has changed, we are responsible if we continue to act as we did in the past. As a patient eloquently put it, "You mean I'm giving conditioned responses to conditions which no longer exist." Time moves on, life changes, but we have a stubborn, tenacious ability to continue to see things "in the future," as "they were." Hence, as May (1983, p. 140) aptly phrased it, "What an individual seeks *to become* determines what he remembers of this *has been*. In this sense the future determines the past."

Social-field Theory

Individuals develop and live in a social context. The idea of a person living outside of a world is incomprehensible. People have challenges; that is part and parcel of being human. Whether or not the challenges become problems is an issue that is contingent upon the individual's phenomenology, goals, and creativity. Not all problems are social problems, for some are genuinely within the province of the individual; but all problems are capable of becoming social problems. For example, if my toe aches, that is a challenge with which I must deal. I may choose to see it as a problem but not bother anybody about it. I can make it a social problem, however, quite easily: I can whine and complain, demand special services, and in general expect an "exemption" from life—and in a social

context, that means that if I fail to pull my share of the load, sooner or later, someone will have to pull it for me or it will be left undone.

Adler (1927/1957, p. 34) stated it this way: "In order to know how a man thinks, we have to examine his relationship to his fellow men We cannot comprehend the psychic activities without at the same time understanding those social relationships" (p. 34). Adler was against classification and labeling. He cautioned that

the student may very easily fall into the error of imagining that a type is something ordained and independent, and that it has as its basis anything more than a structure that is to a large extent homogeneous. If he stops at this point and believes that when he hears the word "criminal," or "anxiety neurosis," or "schizophrenia," he has gained some understanding of the individual case, he not only deprives himself of the possibility of individual research, but he will never be free from misunderstandings that will arise between him and the person whom he is treating. (Adler, 1933/1964f, p. 127)

Flexibility is one key to adaptation, survival, and, as Gazzaniga (1985) postulates, human evolution. To say someone is phobic does not tell you much. Where is he or she phobic? With whom? For how long? What appears to precipitate it? To stop it? How does he or she feel about being phobic? These types of questions help elucidate the phenomenological field, and therefore provide a better grasp of the person. A characteristic of maladaptive behavior is its inflexibility (Krausz, 1973). To continue with our phobic patient: He or she may have been afraid of a particular dog that provided a rather nasty bite when our patient was quite young. If overgeneralization occurs (Mosak, 1995a), all dogs may be perceived as threatening. If overgeneralization occurs, the phobia may be extended to any fur. The underlying assumption (or schema) may be too rigid. A more extreme example would be the man who feels he has to be "The Boss." At work, this may be fine, but it can cause him some grief at home or with his friends.

A somewhat different, but related, issue revolves around preparation for practice as a psychotherapist. If, given this assumption, one needs to know not only the person but the person's social field, therapists need to be versed in more than psychology. Literature, myths, religion, ethnicity, history, movies, and the like all help to illuminate the person's picture.

Striving for Superiority

Motivation, from some Adlerian perspectives, is conceptualized as moving from a perceived minus situation to a perceived plus situation. As Ansbacher and Ansbacher have documented (Adler, 1956), Adler gave

this movement several different names throughout his writings, with the phenomenological “plus” situation being variously described as being:

- A real man
- A will to power
- Self-esteem
- Security
- Perfection
- Completion
- Overcoming
- Superiority

The first four phrases were characteristic of early Adler, when he wrote primarily as a psychoanalyst, and his concepts were about abnormal individuals. The last group evolved as Adler wrote more and more as a philosopher, educator and social psychologist. During this period, he was more interested in describing normal development. A useful distinction is made by Lazarsfeld (1927/1991). She differentiates the normal individual who strives for perfection from the maladaptive person who tries to be perfect. In the first case, one realizes it is a goal that can never be totally achieved; but in the latter, one actually attempts to become perfect. Adler (1933/1964f) states it this way: “The material of life has been constantly bent on reaching a plus from a minus situation” (p. 97).

In practice, it can be difficult to see how some people are moving towards a plus situation, or towards what Adler (1937/1964e), in one of his last papers, finally referred to as superiority. Some elaboration clarifies.

Adler (1937/1964e) felt that everyone strives for superiority. That is the single, motivating force for all living organisms. The final, fictional goal is a goal that the person perceives as bringing him or her that superiority. The degree of social interest that the person displays (see Chapter 7) sets the direction to the striving. If he or she is very interested in the welfare of others, then the striving is on the socially useful side of life, as manifested in caring, compassion, social cooperation, and contribution to the common welfare (Mosak, 1991). If there is a low degree of social interest, then the striving is not prosocial, but rather antisocial (in the broad sense of the term). Those individuals attempt to gain their superiority at the expense of those around them, rather than for the betterment of all involved.

Sometimes, the price one pays to get to the perceived plus (i.e., superiority), may be a “real” (i.e., concrete) minus. First, a relatively common example. In order to have a clean house, I may have to work very hard and sacrifice some of my free time. Similarly, in order to earn a degree, I may have to spend a lot of money and time and put myself through con-

siderable anxiety and discomfort. In the short term, I experience a “minus,” but the “plus” will come. A more clinical example: How can self-mutilation move someone toward a plus situation? Once again, that may be a “real” minus, especially in the short-term situation. Long-term, however, that person may receive attention, others may “walk on eggshells” when near that person (so as to not “upset” him or her), and he or she may gain some sense of subjective relief from the act, including a sense of being able to tolerate pain. The self-mutilator may even develop moral superiority, quoting Jesus (Mark 9:47): “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell.”

The striving for superiority that takes into account the long-term good, or welfare, of those in life can seldom go wrong. If striving for superiority takes place at the expense of others, or on too short a term, others are not very likely to benefit.

Idiographic Orientation

Adlerians tend to emphasize the idiographic nature of individuals, that is, the particulars of the specific person. This is relatively evident, given the assumptions of phenomenology, teleology, soft determinism, holism, and creativity. “Certainly we cannot altogether avoid using it (the general law), for it enables us to generalize . . . but it can give us very little idea of any particular case or its treatment” (Adler, 1933/1964f, p. 127). The general, or nomothetic, laws place us “in the ballpark,” but only by knowing the particular person in his or her phenomenological idiosyncrasies can we know a person. This applies to all people, normal or abnormal.

Research, for instance, has validated Adler’s (1956) assumption that agoraphobic persons tend to value control (see Guidano & Liotti, 1983). That is the nomothetic principle. That does not tell us much about the particular person sitting across from us, in our office, seeking our help because the agoraphobia is becoming unbearable. All of us feel inferior at one time or another; that makes us human (Wolfe, 1932). How we feel inferior, what we define as inferior (e.g., being short, fat, dumb, ugly, too tall, too smart), when, and under what circumstances, all of this fleshes out the idiographic dynamics. Remediation in general, and psychotherapy in particular, is greatly enhanced by knowing the person as a person, not as a cluster of signs, symptoms, and syndromes. The various diagnostic labels place us in the ballpark but do not describe the individual patient. Given the phenomenological and idiographic assumptions, it follows that one cannot completely interpret a dream unless one knows the dreamer.

Psychology of Use

Adler (1929c) stressed that “it is not what one has inherited that is important, but what one does with his inheritance” (p. 37). Mosak (1995a) has noted that life does, to some extent, provide limits to what one can do, but within those limits, the opinion one has of one’s situation, and, hence, the use one makes of it, can be rather startling. A person born without legs will probably never be a high jumper in the Olympics; but Bo Jackson, with his artificial hip, can play for a pennant-contending major league baseball team. As Maniaci (1993, 1996b) points out, a distinction between impairment and disability can prove useful. Two individuals with the same impairment may not be equally disabled. The stances they take toward their situation can be crucial determinants.

Adler’s early work led him to study the biological substrates of organic compensation. Published in 1907, *Study of Organ Inferiority and its Psychological Compensation* was given considerable praise by Freud as having contributed greatly to understanding the biological origins of neurotic dynamics. In it, Adler discussed how certain organs or organ systems tended to compensate for deficiencies. One kidney is removed, and the other enlarges and assumes the missing kidney’s function. As Adler progressed in this thinking, this original biological, mechanistic view became replaced with a more psychological, holistic one. Although organ inferiority still retained its biological definition (an inherited deficiency or weakness of the body or organ or organ system), the compensations became more psychodynamic. Dreikurs (1948b) has elaborated upon this issue at length, and interested readers are referred to that work for a more complete discussion. But for present purposes, those Adlerians who are medically trained (or sensitive) can often quite accurately find biological correlates to many psychological conditions, such as an organ inferiority of the gastrointestinal system leading to personality traits of a getter (Adler, 1956).

Three areas of special interest with reference to the assumption of psychology of use are memory, emotions, and cognitive processes. We examine each in turn.

Adler (1927/1957) noted that what we remember is greatly influenced by where we are going (hence May’s comment noted previously about our future determining our past). As Adler stated, “We remember those events whose recollection is important for a specific psychic tendency” (p. 49). If I want to move toward someone, I will remember nice, pleasant things about that person; but as soon as I want to move away from or against that person (Horney, 1945), I will remember negative, unpleasant things. These serve to justify my movement to my goal. Not only will I remember what suits my purpose, but I will forget what does not suit it

as well. The role of memory, and early recollections specifically, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9, in which the process of assessment is detailed. For the present discussion, suffice to say that memory, like many other tendencies, is greatly influenced and used according to the goal we set for ourselves.

Emotions are much the same. Adler (1927/1957, 1956) spoke of disjunctive and conjunctive emotions. Like other psychological processes, emotions are used according to the goals people establish (Beecher & Beecher, 1971/1987; Dreikurs, 1951). Some emotions move us towards others; others move us away. Adlerians tend to view emotions as motivators for behavior; to use a metaphor, they are the gasoline we use to power us to our goals. Interestingly enough, contemporary psychoanalysts such as Basch (1988, p. 68) state that “the affect attached to a particular perceptual goal moves a person to engage in behavior that will fulfill or reach it.” This is strikingly similar to Adler’s formulation. Once again, the idiographic component of Individual Psychology is important, for to know what purpose a particular emotion serves one needs to know the person. Some general guidelines about two particular emotions can offer some clarity: anger and hurt.

If one is angry, it generally serves the purpose of motivating one to change something. It is as if one is saying, “There is something about it or me that needs changing.” However, for various reasons the person may fear or be unwilling to attempt that change. By being hurt the person avoids changing *it* then because she or he first has to get over the hurt. The person shifts her or his focus from changing *it* to changing her or his feelings. More clinical examples, such as anxiety, fear, depression, and aggression are discussed in Chapter 8.

Finally, Adler (1956) made a distinction between common sense and private sense (private intelligence) or what has more recently been referred to as private logic. Ansbacher (1965) and Dreikurs (1973) have provided detailed analyses.

Common sense is that which is shared with others, the ability to speak a common language and share perceptions with others. One ingredient of common sense is consensuality; we all agree upon it. A second is that what we all agree upon may be a fiction (Vaihinger, 1911/1965). In reality, a paper dollar is only a piece of paper. We can tear it, burn it, write on it, and the like. But our society has created the fiction that it has worth, and as long as we observe that fiction and behave *as if* it has worth, it makes commerce easier. Private logic has three components: immediate goals, hidden reasons, and life style goals.

Life style goals or long-term, personality goals, are the final, fictional goals. As mentioned previously, those are generally nonconscious, non-verbal, and not clearly understood by individuals. Immediate goals are

those short-term goals that are more readily attainable. These too are often not clearly understood and were discussed previously. The hidden reason is the explanation we give ourselves for what we are doing. Maniaci (1993) has provided a clinical example of how all three operate in a case formulation, and a brief example is provided to illustrate:

Life style goal
 To be perfect
 Frequent Immediate Goals
 To look good
 To be without error
 To never be corrected
 Frequent hidden reasons
 "I'm always right."
 "Who are you to judge me?"
 "I can't let anybody see me as weak."

Imagine a client with this private logic. In his striving to be perfect, he does not allow anyone to contradict him; he is difficult and moody if "crossed" (and remember, given his phenomenology, he may perceive "crossed" quite differently than others). His hidden reasons (what many cognitive therapists term "self-statements" or "automatic thoughts") reflect this bias. A more detailed analysis of private logic is presented in the chapters on development, life style, and psychopathology.

Finally, cognitive processes such as intelligence are greatly influenced by the person's private logic. For instance, if it does not suit a person's goal to use his or her intelligence, than that person may choose to fail in school if it furthers him or her along towards his or her goal. As one student gleefully announced after flunking out of medical school, "That's the first decision I ever made without my parents in all my life."

Acting "As If"

Adler (1956) was greatly influenced by the work of the philosopher, Hans Vaihinger (1911/1965). According to Vaihinger, people construct "fictions" that help move them through life. These fictions are like lines drawn on a map. They do not exist in reality, but they provide useful guidelines for navigating. Adler applied this philosophical insight to his clinical work. It soon became a cornerstone of his theory.

Given the aforementioned assumptions, people select goals, perceive according to those goals, and move throughout life as if all of this were "true." From a phenomenological standpoint, for the particular person,

all of it *is* true. But as Adler (1912/1983b) stated on the first page of his first psychological book, “Everything is a matter of opinion.” People act according to their fictions, their beliefs, and even set out to have life (and other people) conform to their expectations or construct life in terms of their expectations. Hence, someone who feels inferior tends to act that way, or to compensate so as to appear superior.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

This is a natural outgrowth of the tendency to act “as if.” As Festinger (1957) attempted to establish, if given a discrepancy between what we believe and what “is,” cognitive dissonance occurs. We tend to stick to our beliefs. Adler (1933/1964f, pp. 19–20) provides an example:

In a word, I am convinced that a person’s behaviour springs from his idea As a matter of fact, it has the same effect on one whether a poisonous snake is actually approaching my foot or whether I merely believe it is a poisonous snake.

If I believe “it’s a dog-eat-dog world out there,” I act as if it is, construe events to support my belief, and probably provoke others to take a cold, if not hostile, stance toward me. I then feel justified in declaring, “See! I was right!” As Milton stated over 300 years ago, the mind can make a heaven of hell, or a hell of heaven.

Optimism

The last assumption of Individual Psychology is that of optimism. Freud’s system is basically pessimistic; it postulates a different set of assumptions about human nature, assumptions that view individuals as in conflict, not only within themselves but with each other. Adler’s system is much more optimistic. People can, and do, change. They can, and do, take responsibility for themselves and are quite capable of working cooperatively for the greater good. Adler (1978) was rather clear about one point, however, that is frequently overlooked. People are neither good nor bad; *human nature is neutral*. This view was enunciated by the 12th-century physician and philosopher Maimonides (1180/1944), who wrote,

Pay no attention to the view . . . that at man’s birth God decrees whether he shall be righteous or wicked. That is not so! Every person has the power of becoming as righteous as Moses or wicked as Jeroboam—wise or stupid, tender or cruel, miserly or generous. (5:1–2)

Heredity, environment, and the choice of the creative self all interact to help the person produce the final, fictional goal, which can be socially useful or useless, or neutral itself, with the nature of the movement towards that goal being “good” or “bad.” Adler was not naive. He lived through a world war, worked with criminals, psychotics, and the underprivileged. He knew the extremes of human nature as well as did Freud. Freud came out of World War I and postulated the death instinct. He felt that the ultimate aim of human life was to return to an inorganic state. Adler came out of the same war, a war in which he served as a physician, and postulated the concept of social interest, more recently called community feeling (Ansbacher, 1992a). We, as a species, have the potential for good. Whether or not we actualize it is up to us. We are responsible for our fate—the best of it, or the worst of it.

□ Summary

The assumptions of Individual Psychology are not very complex. Adler (1956) disliked technical jargon, and he was determined to avoid making his system too complicated. To paraphrase him, on the surface it appears simple, but to those who know the system, it is comprehensive, broad in scope, and sophisticated in breadth.

Having established the foundation, let us now turn our attention to how individuals develop. The development of the life style is examined in the next chapter, and with that, the assumptions that have been presented in static form can be seen in action, as they apply to the understanding of personality.

□ Points to Consider

By knowing the assumptions of a system, one is in a better position to evaluate that system. Systems should be evaluated based upon their adherence to their assumptions, not from the basis of another set of assumptions.

Adlerians emphasize the final cause of people’s behavior. Although they consider all four causes (as detailed by Aristotle), they believe the final cause is crucial.

Adler was neutral with regard to human nature. He felt that people could be either good or bad.

Adlerians tend to speak of probable outcomes of certain backgrounds. This is known as soft determinism.

Although it is important to understand what a person has, it is more important to understand the use she or he makes of her or his qualities.

Questions

1. What is phenomenology? How is it incorporated into Adlerian psychology?
2. What did Adler mean by “fictions?”
3. What are some of the various terms Adler used to describe the “plus” position people strive for?
4. What is the difference between freedom to choose and freedom of choice?
5. How do Adlerians introduce teleology into their system?
6. How do Adlerians tend to view “intrapsychic conflict?”