

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY AND KARL MARX

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In a paper "Dissent in the Early History of Psychoanalysis" (Vowinckel Welgert, 1942) the leading features of Freud's, Adler's and Jung's systems were compared. The evaluation of Adler, in which credit was given to his lasting contributions, contained, however, such statements as: that Adler was motivated by socialistic ideals; that he confounded the society of his culture with the ideal human society; and, that he failed to recognize the limitations and pathology of a culture that at times forces a neurotic rebellion on people. Finally, that for Adler the highest value was a good adjustment to society and that maladjustment was at the opposite end.

It would be irrelevant to point to certain contradictions in the preceding statements. Adler would have had difficulties making his patients docile members of the then prevailing capitalistic society while at the same time impressing on them socialistic doctrines incompatible with that society. Did Adler's political convictions penetrate into Individual Psychology, thus jeopardizing the patient's autonomy? It is the purpose of this paper to clarify this issue.

IS INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY SOCIALISM IN DISGUISE?

Alfred Adler joined the socialist party because it was the only one then and there concerned with the fate of the masses fighting for social justice. Truly a humanitarian, he initially shared Marx's materialistic view of history, but parted from him later by rejecting his concepts of determinism and revolution (Furtmüller, 1964). The main tie between Adler and Marx was their sociocentric interpretation of man. Adler would certainly have agreed with Marx's statement that man is "not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society" (Marx, 1904, p. 268). Marx expressed his concept of society in his theses on the German philosopher Feuerbach: "The human essence is the ensemble of the social relations, which shape the consciousness of the individual" (Marx, 1935, p. 42). He reiterates this concept: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on

the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1904, p. 11).

The following idea, in which human warmth can be felt, would have been close to Adler's heart (it appears in an early manuscript in which Marx discusses the functions—and malignant aspects—of money): "Let us assume man to be man, and his relation to the world a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust. . . . Every one of your relations to man and nature must be a specific expression corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life" (Fromm, 1971, p. 168).

However, the mature Marx recognized man only in his relation to a specific form of society, whereas Adler largely ignores the social aspects of human relations. He deals only with the man-to-man relation, and when he speaks of society he actually means *Gemeinschaft* and not *Gesellschaft* (Spiel, 1957, p. 141).

DID ADLER CONFOUND THE SOCIETY OF HIS TIME WITH THE IDEAL HUMAN SOCIETY?

Adler did not confuse contemporary society with the ideal human society. The ideal society was the distant goal to which social interest was the road. He was fully aware of "the failures of our civilization, in whose imperfections all of us are implicated, and [which] demands cooperation for their removal" (Adler, 1964, p. 104). To him society is not "a present-day community or society, a specific political or religious formation. It is rather the goal which is best suited for perfection, a goal which would have to signify the ideal community of all mankind, the ultimate fulfillment of [societal] evolution" (Adler, 1956, p. 142). Obviously, Adler could not have taught docility to the existing forms of society, the shortcomings of which he was fully aware.

Yet, Adler was willing to accept any human group and even class movement provided they accepted cooperation as their operating means because class movement represented cooperation. He was not prejudiced as long as the improvement of mankind was the goal (Adler, 1958, p. 254). In contrast to Marx, he did not think in political terms nor did he have in mind specific societal goals. Where there had been withdrawal, there shall be cooperation—this was Adler's aim for psychotherapy. For him, cooperation itself was the goal

for which Individual Psychology had to establish the psychological basis (Dreikurs, 1957, p. 151).

Adler considered social interest as a potential quality in every human being. He was not concerned with establishing its source, but with its development. It is significant that the concept of conscience does not exist in Adler's writings and he appears completely absorbed in the concept of social interest—another proof of Adler's aversion to societal concepts. For, in contrast to social interest, conscience reflects the values of a specific society and its existing order.

ADLER'S SCALE OF VALUES

In Adler's system every neurosis is expressed and understood as maladjustment to society (if society is understood as *Gemeinschaft*). No human being can be evaluated unless social interest is used as a standard. A character can be judged as bad or good only from the viewpoint of society (Adler, 1969, pp. 38, 137). Adler never doubted that the totality of man's psychic life could be fully comprehended within the sphere of his human relations. Thus his definition of the right perspective was simple enough: "A thought, a feeling, or an act is to be characterized as right only when it is right *sub specie aeternitatis* (in the light of eternity). And, further, the welfare of the community must be incontestably included within it" Adler, 1964, p. 146). He evaluates attitudes as 'correct,' 'normal,' or 'valuable' only when they are of service to mankind (p. 243).

Adler's references to mankind and eternity are abstract and messianic, and do not refer to existing societies, yet he would affirm that the development of social feelings and the spirit of cooperation make the individual fit for participation in the life of the state and the nation, but not necessarily as a docile member.

Freud makes the remark in *Civilization and its Discontents* that it is the purpose of civilization to combine single individuals, families, races, peoples and nations into one great unity of mankind. "Why this has to happen, we do not know" (Freud, 1962, p. 69). Neither did Adler. But he tried to make it come true.

CONCLUSION

Adler's choice of natural man, one not formed by society, places him in an unbridgeable opposition to Marx's concept of man as

shaped by society. Not by society but by his human relationships and his own perception of them, is man formed.

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