# Immanuel Kant's Influence on the Psychology of Alfred Adler

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### Abstract

The influence of Immanuel Kant's philosophy on the psychology of Alfred Adler is important to understand because Kant much earlier addressed many ideas and concepts assumed original with Adler. Kant addressed the concepts of private sense and common sense, the primacy of reason, the existential questions of life, fictions, the power of the mind over sense perceptions, the unconscious and conscious mind, unity of the person, fostering community feeling, and determining a moral course of action, all concepts Adler later applied to his psychology. Familiarity with Kant's works can help clinicians gain a better understanding of what Adler wrote and implied when explicating Individual Psychology. Kant's writings can be complicated and difficult to understand, but several very readable essays are recommended and readily available.

The purpose of this article is to show the influence of Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) philosophy upon the psychology of Alfred Adler (1870–1937). A number of Adler's important ideas can be traced back to the writings of Kant. This is not to diminish Adler's contributions to psychology because it is Adler's elucidation of these concepts for understanding behavior that is striking. This connection between Kant and Adler relates a segment of the continuing stream of thought in intellectual history that connects the ideas from one thinker to those of another. Ellenberger (1970) wrote, "Adler has many affinities with Kant" (p. 628). However, Ellenberger stopped short of elucidating any of these connections save a very short discussion of common sense and private sense. Kant's influence upon the ideas contained in the psychology of Adler is substantiated in this presentation by a number of quotations taken from Kant and from Adler to illustrate this connection.

## The Influence of Kant

Kant was born, lived and died in Königsberg, Prussia, since 1945 designated as Kaliningrad, a port located on the Baltic Sea. It was united with the Soviet Union following World War II and is now a Russian oblast located between Lithuania and Poland just east of Gdańsk. Kant never ventured

more than a few miles from the city of his birth. It was said that Kant followed such a practiced routine one could set a watch by his schedule. His funeral was a city-wide event because he became greatly esteemed by the populace.

If Kant's works are read today, then it occurs in a college course. The reading assignment might include Kant's (1784/1909) *Critique of Pure Reason.* This book is usually described as one of the driest and most confusing attempts to explain "reason" imaginable. For example, Kaufmann (1980) called it "one of the worst written books of all times" (p. 7). Fortunately, Kant also wrote some "brilliant essays," admitted as such by Kaufmann. These essays are described by Windelband (1901/1958) as "distinguished by an easy-flowing, graceful presentation, and present themselves as admirable occasional writings of a man of fine thought who is well versed in the world" (p. 535). Windelband goes on to describe *The Critique of Pure Reason* and Kant's two successive "critiques" as "laborious in thought." But there is no question Kant's writings were highly influential. Although Kaufmann generally disliked and disagreed with Kant, he (1980) devoted more than one-third of a book to an analysis of Kant's thought. Copleston (1960), whose history of philosophy requires 13 paperback volumes, devoted two volumes to Kant. He gave more attention to the philosophy of Kant than he devoted to any other thinker in his history of philosophy. Studies of Kant's thought have generated hundreds of volumes, much more than for any other philosopher.

In spite of Kaufmann's negative viewpoint and that of many others, it would benefit readers to follow Windelband's advice and read Kant's essays if not his major works. Readers might start with the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, and What is Enlightenment?* (1785/1959), and *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (1983). The ideas presented in these essays are fundamental to the contemporary issues voiced today. While Kant never left the city of his birth he was a cosmopolitan in the true sense of the word. He was a great thinker, sometimes thought to be muddle-headed, but one who kept abreast of world events better than most. He offered useful ideas regarding questions of morality and the promotion of a peaceful world. No doubt Kant also borrowed ideas from other thinkers. This phenomenon of borrowing ideas illustrates how "intellectual DNA" passes from one generation to another (see Primack & Abrams, 2006).

Adler probably made his acquaintance with the ideas of Kant when he was a student. Any student following the curriculum of a German *Gymnasium* would study the works of Kant, and both Freud and Adler were products of Gymnasiums. The courses of the Gymnasium included Latin, Greek, German literature, French or English, science, and math as the basic subjects of a university-oriented curriculum. A critical study of Kant was an essential aspect of the curriculum.

Kant's influence on Adler's thought is shown by enumerating the essential ideas common to both and supported from primary sources. Following an introduction to each concept, these commonalities are explicated as space permits.


## Common Sense and Private Sense

Ansbacher (1965) explicated the matter of "common sense versus private sense" before an English translation of Kant's (1798/1978) *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* became available. Ansbacher wrote, "Private intelligence is for Adler one of the basic characteristics of all failures in life" (p. 48). Later in the article, Ansbacher points out that in some of Adler's papers written in German, Adler inserted the English phrase *common sense*. Ansbacher continues, "The great surprise for the Adlerian in the new translation from Kant is to discover that he [Kant] had made the same distinction between private sense and common sense well over 100 years before Adler" (p. 48).

In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant (1798/1978) explicates common and private sense and what it means for understanding behavior. This explanation is what many persons attribute to Adler without recognizing its origins in the writings of Kant.

Adler's explication of common sense and private sense is based on a quotation taken from Kant that can be found in Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956):

> The only general characteristic of insanity is the loss of a sense for ideas that are
> · common to all (*sensus communis*), and its replacement with a sense for ideas
> peculiar to ourselves (*sensus privatus*). It is a subjectively necessary touchstone
> of the correctness of our judgment and, consequently, of the soundness of our
> understanding that we relate our understanding to the understanding of others, and not merely isolate ourselves within our own experiences, and make
> · public quasi judgments which are merely based on our own private ideas . . .
> whereby he perceives, decides and acts, not in a world shared with others, but
> rather (as in a dream) he sees himself in his own little world. (p. 117)

Common sense as described by Adler coincides with Kant's view. The quotation also shows Kant's concern for relating to and understanding other persons' viewpoints. This is foundational to Adler's passion for community feeling or social interest. Kant specified that *common sense* was an aspect of cognition "shared with others." In Kant's philosophy, common sense expresses understanding derived from "a world shared with others," and private sense is the consequence of "isolation." Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) expressed these same ideas, saying, "Individual

Psychology maintains that the power of social interest lies at the basis of all social products, such as language and reason or 'common sense'" (p. 449).

Adler indicated the foundation of community feeling is based on achieving a state of common sense. One need not be psychotic to exemplify "isolation" or "private logic/sense." Kant describes *sensus privatus* as a characteristic of all persons who follow a private mode of thinking in spite of evidence to the contrary. Adler also understood and emphasized the presence of private thinking embodied in one's fictive goal.

But these descriptions of *sensus privatus* should never be applied in an absolute sense. There are occasions where an apparently private sense has subsequently changed to common sense and thereafter has become the new norm. Einstein's early papers on relativity were greeted with great skepticism by contemporary physicists although today so many people speak of relativity you would think they actually understood his revolutionary ideas. The intriguing aspect of this matter is that it took almost 20 years after Einstein published his papers before the English astronomer Eddington (1922) was able to confirm empirically one of Einstein's ideas by astronomical observations. Eddington had directed a 1919 expedition to the island of Principe off the coast of West Africa to observe the solar eclipse of May 29, and data from his observations confirmed Einstein's prediction that light from a star would be bent as it passed through the sun's strong gravitational field.

While many assume that common sense reflects knowledge and understanding better than private sense, there are occasions where independent thinking in the guise of private logic has outweighed and eventually overthrown what was first accepted as common sense. There are many examples of common sense later recognized to be "collective nonsense." Delightfully written examples can be found in *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (Mackay, 1841). Mackay's book indicates how difficult it is to be independent-minded when everybody else is deluded and madly pursuing nonsense. We ought to be cautious in making judgments and arbitrary decisions about what constitutes private sense or common sense. Kant (1798/1978) was careful to address this issue. He defined "common sense" as not literally "common" but based on "sound human understanding" (p. 58).

Ansbacher (1965) indicated that Adler much earlier used *Gemeinsinn* for designating common sense. Gemeinsinn was Kant's German designation for *sensus communis,* and he (1785/1959) used *gemeine Vernunfterkenntnis* for "common rational knowledge." Ansbacher also indicated that Adler, "understood *Gemeinsinn* as an innate cognitive aptitude, just as he later understood the germ of *Gemienshaftsgefühl* to be innate" (p. 50). Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) wrote, "common sense (a social function) is working for improvement" (p. 192). This remark indicates that common sense is a process and one that never ends.

The attention given to common sense and private sense is not simply a matter of semantics and word meaning, but one that is foundational to understanding human behavior. In Adler's later writings, and for later generations of followers it is *Gemienshaftsgefühl* or community feeling. Community feeling is joined with common sense and these two concepts are intertwined by the application of reason.

## Thoughts and Actions

The original manuscript of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* was written by Kant around 1797–98. In it, he summarized the public lectures he had given for many years. One important topic Kant addressed was *What is Man?* He delivered these talks to a general audience in the city, not merely to his university students. Interestingly, Adler also addressed some of the same questions posed earlier by Kant in Chapter 1 of *What Life Could Mean to You* (1931/1992). This chapter is titled "The Meaning of Life" (p. 15). Adler begins the chapter by addressing several profound and existential questions: What is the meaning of life? What is life for? What does life mean? Adler evaluates the meaning behind these questions by discussing what he calls "the realm of meaning" operating in language communication. He does this to address and determine what is required by a thinking person to answer these questions by common sense or private sense. Adler wrote,

> It is, rather, in his action that each person inevitably poses these questions, and answers them. . . . Each person behaves as if he could rely upon a certain interpretation of life. In all his actions there is an implicit summing up of the world. (pp. 15–16)

Adler (1931/1992) indicated that actions are what truly describe the internal perspective of a person. One's philosophy of life need not be articulated because it is acted out in the course of living. Similar quotations illustrate a connection between the psychology of Adler and existential philosophy, in which major attention is given to understanding the meaning of life in the context of lived experience and not by metaphysical abstractions.

Using but one example, Karl Jaspers (1956), a prominent existential philosopher, expressed a remarkably similar viewpoint in a personal memoir:

> Since the basic questions of philosophy grow, as practical activity, from life, their form is at any given moment in keeping with the historical situation, but this situation is part of the continuity of tradition. The questions put earlier in history are still ours; in part identical with present ones, word for word, after thousands of years, in part more distant and strange, so that we make them our

own only by translation. The basic questions were formulated by Kant with, I felt, moving simplicity: "1. What can I know? 2. What shall I do? 3. What may I hope? 4. What is man?" (p. 139)

Jaspers recognized in his personal recollection that Kant had earlier stated the basic questions important for establishing meaning to one's life. They are questions for every person to answer. Adler exemplified an existential concern by presenting these questions to his readers.


## Reason

Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) wrote,

> By reason we understand *with Kant,* a process which has general validity. Hence, by reasonable we understand common sense. We may define common sense as all those forms of expression and as the content of all behavior which we find beneficial to the community. This represents the kind of action and conduct which we designate as reasonable. *Thus we come to a fuller understanding of Kant's conclusion, in that we now see that reason is inseparably connected with social interest.* (p. 149, emphasis added)

Kant's formal discussion of reason is largely contained in *The Critique of Pure Reason,* which cannot be discussed here, but it is important to give one illustration to impart something of the important issue Kant hoped to resolve. The passage also gives the flavor and complexity of his exposition in addressing the mind as distinguished from physical reality, a classic philosophical issue.

Section V in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1784/1909) is titled "In all Theoretical Sciences of Reason Synthetical Judgments a priori are contained as Principles." Kant specifies:

> All mathematical judgments are synthetical. First of all, we ought to observe, that mathematical propositions, properly so called, are always judgments a priori, and not empirical, because they carry along with them necessity, which can never be deduced from experience. At first sight one might suppose indeed that the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ is merely analytical, following, according to the principle of contradiction, from the concept of a sum of 7 and 5. But, if we look more closely, we shall find that the concepts of the sum of 7 and 5 contains nothing beyond the union of both sums into one, whereby nothing is told us as to what this single number may be which combines both. We by no means arrive at a conception of 12, by thinking the union of $7 + 5$; and we may analyze our concept of such a possible sum as long as we will, still we shall never discover in it the concept of 12. We must go beyond these concepts, and call in the assistance of the intuition corresponding to one of

the two, for instance, our five fingers, or as Segner does in his arithmetic, five points, and so by degrees add the units of the five, given in intuition, to the concept of the seven. For I first take the number 7, and taking the intuition of the fingers of my hand, in order to form with it the concept of the 5, I gradually add the units, which I before took together, to make up the number 5, by means of the image of my hand, to the number 7, and I thus see the number 12 arising before me. That 5 should be added to 7 was no doubt implied in my concept of a sum 7 + 5, but not that that sum should be equal to 12. An arithmetical proposition is, therefore, always synthetical, which is seen more easily still by taking larger numbers, where we clearly perceive that, turn and twist our conception as we may, we could never, by means of the mere analysis of our concepts and without the help of intuition arrive at the sum that is wanted. (pp. 36–37)

This long quotation illustrates the complexity of the issue under discussion and Kant's ponderous style of writing. He argues that certain synthetic propositions are a priori. That is, they are true apart from experience. They exist in the understanding of the mind as synthetic a priori truths. The propositions of mathematics were classified by Kant as examples of synthetic a priori truths. They exist apart from experience. Kant gave "7 + 5 = 12" as an example. He argued that this formula is synthetic because the predicate "12" does not merely repeat the subject "7 + 5" but requires synthesizing and is thus "produced" by the constructive act of addition or counting. The numeral "12" conveys something different from "7 + 5."

Moritz Schlick (1962), the Viennese philosopher and organizer of the logical positivists, argued against this viewpoint. Schlick said there are no synthetic a priori truths. He maintained that all propositions that add to our knowledge must be based upon experience, that is, they must employ the empirical sciences. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922), the Cambridge philosopher, called all mathematical propositions tautologies, merely intricate ways of saying "A = A." Hence, 7 + 5 = 12 is tautological, said Wittgenstein, and merely indicates that 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 and nothing more. It is not constructive or synthetic according to Schlick and Wittgenstein in opposition to Kant's viewpoint.

The issue here is to appreciate the problem that Kant tried to resolve in clarifying the role of reason and its importance for Individual Psychology. In this illustration, Kant argued that individuals "construct knowledge" taken from the "forms of understanding" that are cognitive functions contained within our minds. Adler (2002) cited Kant, saying,

the *whole range of our perception* is limited by a number of ready-made psychic mechanisms, as Kant's theory of our mind's forms of perceptions also shows. (p. 43, emphasis added)

Kant argued that functions of the mind form, control, and even dictate what is perceived. Kant (1789/1911) also wrote of the fictive goal, "where we realize a preconceived concept of an object which we set before ourselves *as an end*" (p. 34, emphasis added).

Adler seized upon this important point by Kant about the capacity of the mind to influence sense perception. The mind's "ready-made psychic mechanisms" may distort any sense perception because of the strong influence of the mind in dictating what is to be interpreted, and even how or if it exists. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) follows Kant's philosophical position by writing,

> All thinking, feeling, and acting is based on an (interpretation, a greater or lesser) error which we can influence by discovering it. This view is not new. We find it in Kant, in pragmatism, in Vaihinger's philosophy "As-If." But although our entire practical action is founded in it, it has never been taken into practical consideration. (p. 91)

Adler's use of "pragmatism" comes from Kant's *Anthropology* and from Kant's (1798/1978) argument for the dictatorial power of the mind over sense perception by "imagining the subjective to be the objective, and thereby taking the mood of the inner sense for knowledge of the thing itself" (p. 184).

This discussion of the mind influencing and even controlling experience illustrates an important connection between Kant's thoughts about human understanding and Adler's explication of normality and pathology in thinking. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) makes his point by writing,

> No matter at which point one investigates the psychological development of the healthy or the neurotic person, one always finds him enmeshed in his schema, the neurotic believing in his fiction and not finding his way back to reality, the healthy person using it to attain a goal in reality. This artifice of thinking . . . to free himself from the bonds of his fiction, to eliminate his projections (Kant) from his calculations and to use only the impetus which springs from this guiding line. (pp. 96–97)

Adler inserted Kant's name in parentheses to show the connection between what Kant had earlier specified, and what he [Adler] later adopted to explain the influence of mental fictions upon sense perception. While other philosophers have attacked Kant's position on synthetic a priori statements, Adler grasped a special application of Kant's argument to show how mental constructions dominate perception. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) expressed this understanding by writing,

> our whole sphere of perception is limited by a number of existing psychological mechanisms and readinesses, as is also expressed in Kant's theory of a priori forms of perception. (p. 210)

Once again, Adler bolsters his argument by citing Kant and his "a priori forms of perception" to show how cognition and human behavior are supported by a mental construction. Mental constructions can be faulty and not always connected to reality. They are constructed in the mind and serve what Adler called a fictive goal.

Reading *Anthropology* provides a more lucid explanation of Kant's position on these issues than can be gained by reading *Critique of Pure Reason.* In a section of *Anthropology* titled "On Being Arbitrarily Conscious of One's Ideas," Kant explains that individuals must become mentally conscious of their perceptions in order to abstract correctly from experience. Kant (1798/1978) writes,

> Therefore, one does not speak of abstracting (separating) something, but of abstracting from something, that is abstracting from the object of my sense impression, whereby the definition preserves the universality of a concept, and is thus taken into the understanding. For a man to be able to make an abstraction from a sense impression, even when the sense impression forces itself on his senses, is proof of a far greater faculty than just paying attention, because it gives evidence of a freedom of the faculty of thought, and sovereignty of the mind in having the condition of one's senses impressions under one's control. In this respect the faculty of abstraction is much more difficult, but also more important than the faculty of perception when it encounters sense impressions. (p. 14)

Kant indicates that it is the "power of abstraction" that is critical for understanding the reality of the world, but such abstractions can be either "useful or useless" as first Kant and then Adler describe this cognitive task. Abstraction allows people to generalize from sense experience and thus gain vital knowledge of the world. Faulty abstraction produces an incorrect understanding that is formed by distorting perceptions via private logic. The latter occurs when one's sense perceptions are under the domination of mental functioning that serves a fictive goal. Human understanding (reason according to Kant) in a community sense (common sense) is the criteria Kant proposed for discerning truth in perceptions and ideas.

## The Unconscious

Kant (1798/1978) defined the "unconscious" in cognition, saying, "we can be indirectly conscious of having an idea, although we are not directly conscious of it" (p. 18). He called such ideas "obscure, and not clear." Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) followed Kant by saying almost the same thing, "The unconscious is nothing other that that which we have been unable to formulate in clear concepts" (p. 232). Later, Adler (as cited in Murchinson, 1973) wrote, "there appears no contrast between the

conscious and the unconscious" (p. 398). He wanted no distinction made between conscious and unconscious.

## Fictions and As If

Adler appreciated Kant's position on fictions as much as he did the ideas of Vaihinger (1924). Adler's readers probably associate the idea of fictions more with Vaihinger than with Kant. However, Vaihinger was a Kant scholar and in Part III of *The Philosophy of "As If"* Vaihinger wrote, "We are indebted to Kant, whose As-If approach has remained almost un-noticed and misunderstood for more than a hundred years" (p. 271).

Should we add another hundred years to Vaihinger's appraisal, in-asmuch as Kant's early explication of "fictions" still remains "unnoticed and misunderstood" as well as falsely believed to originate with Adler or Vaihinger? It was Kant who provided an early explication of fictions and their historical use, according to Vaihinger's own account. In fact, the concept of "fictions" can be traced to earlier philosophers, especially the writings of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Vaihinger (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) addressed his intellectual dependence upon Kant: "The overwhelming number of passages from Kant which we have quoted and discussed sufficiently proved that the as-if view plays an extraordinarily important part in Kant. This side of Kant has hitherto been almost entirely neglected" (p. 85).

Kant said fictions result from a faulty interpretation of perceptions under the control of the mind. Kant established the primacy of the mind over sense perceptions in his philosophy and showed how it could distort reality. On the useful side, mental primacy permits abstractions to be made, creativity to result, and discoveries to occur. The negative consequences of mental primacy produce distortions on the useless side. Kant's concept of "fictions" is basic and fundamental to Adler's explication of pathology in thinking. Adler said "mistakes in behavior" occur from the mental postulation of a "fictive goal," with distorted cognition causing all sense perceptions to suit that goal.

Adler (1979) identified reason with common sense and community feel-ing as shown by the following statement:

> Thus he is a part of the whole who proves himself in correspondence with the community and useful to it. All this taken together is a way of acting and behav-ing which we designate as "reasonable." Reasonable is what one understands by common sense. [The English phrase "common sense" occurs in Adler's original work in German.] Thus we arrive at Kant's conclusion: Reason has general validity. This would mean at the same time that we comprehend under

reason all action, behaviors, and forms of expression which depend on a goal of superiority in which the common welfare find expression. (pp. 43–44)

The primacy of reason is an important aspect of Adler's psychology. We recognize its origins and its resulting distortions from a consideration of Kant's thought on Adler's position as expressed in the above quotation.

## Moral Behavior

If Kant is remembered at all by his readers, it is for his views on moral behavior. Kant expressed morality by stipulating that any question about behavior should first be maximized as a *categorical imperative.* The expression of the categorical imperative given by Windelband (1901/1958) is the most authentic in English: "Act as if the maxim from your act were to become through your will a universal law of nature" (p. 552).

There is a great difference for Kant between obeying the law and defining the parameters of moral behavior for an individual, a group, or state. His solution to the question of what behavior to follow was the formulation of the categorical imperative. By hypothesizing the act as if it were to be made a universal law, we are able to test the maxim in question. It is not that we should make universal laws but that we apply the categorical imperative to the matter in question in order to determine if it has merit and should therefore determine our action. The translation by Windelband clearly illustrates the as-if quality of Kant's hypothesized maxim, which was seized upon by Vaihinger as an important mental mechanism. It was to become the key to his book on the as-if quality in fictions.

*Will* for Kant is not to be interpreted as stubborn willfulness but personal intention to take responsibility for one's behavior. Adler said courageous action was indispensable to living and addressing the tasks of life.

Adler (2002) caught the flavor of the as-if process by writing,

> Careful examination shows that there is a type of sympathetic understanding for reasons of security at the basis of every characteristic, as the formula in Kant's categorical imperative clearly demonstrates for the whole character, when this philosopher wants to suggest that the action of every individual is guided by this point of view, namely *as if* it should be made into a universal maxim. (p. 182)

Contained in this quotation we find Kant's contribution to what is commonly known as Adler's conception of the final fictive goal. The fictive quality of Kant's as-if exposition and the positing of a universal maxim are two key concepts from Kant clearly manifest in Adler's explication of purposeful behavior.

Adler's conception of community also fulfills the criteria of Kant's categorical imperative. We can apply the test of the categorical imperative to the concept of community feeling. If encouraging community feeling was made a universal law what reasonable person would object to its goal? Community feeling clearly satisfies the requirement of the categorical imperative.

Kant (1798/1978) gave a further simple illustration: "Man was not meant to belong to a herd like domestic animals, but rather, like the bee, to belong to a hive community" (p. 247). Each one must contribute to the community. Adler caught this essence of Kant's philosophy and applied it to his concept of community feeling.

In Kant's (1785/1959) essay, "What is Enlightenment?" he begins with a powerful statement:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. "Have courage to use your own reason!"—that is the motto of enlightenment. (p. 85)

Kant's position is that enlightenment pertains primarily to the individual self. Kant was a defender of personal freedom, but he clearly recognized that bondage occurred for many persons primarily because they choose to bind themselves to a person or goal and to surrender personal freedom to this bondage. Kant argued that the most extreme case of bondage was not external but came from surrendering one's individual mind and forsaking reason. His argument for applying the categorical imperative was not to encourage the construction of maxims but to discourage the proliferation of unnecessary moral edicts. His categorical imperative was designed to reduce numerous and irrelevant rules in favor of personal freedom. There should be a minimum of maxims, but with great attention given to reason and human understanding nurtured by a concern for the well-being of others. Kant argued that one should act out of reverence for the worth of all life. Kant's imperative calls for "courage" to act, which is what Adler said needs to be nurtured.


## Unity of the Person

Kant (1798/1978, p. 9) wrote, "Man is aware of an ego concept. . . . He remains one and the same person despite all the vicissitudes which may befall him." From this position stated by Kant, we see how Adler accepted Kant's argument for the unity of the personality. Ego in this usage comes from the Greek word εγω meaning the "I" or the totality of the self. Adler (as

cited in Murchinson, 1973) wrote, "As Kant has said, we can never under-stand a person if we do not presuppose his unity" (p. 199).

## Community

The quotations given earlier by Kant concerning the use of "community" and specifically his mention of "community" in the allegory of the beehive show that Kant considered this concept immensely important. It would ap-pear that the English word "feeling" and not "interest" better describes what Adler meant when he said it was naturally possessed by everyone but also indicated that it must be nurtured into action. Kant (1798/1978) wrote, "It does not depend on what Nature makes of man, but what man makes of himself . . . What man makes of himself reveals his character" (p. 203). This idea expressed by Kant was reiterated in numerous statements made by Adler.

## The Thing-In-Itself

Adler's discussion (1931/1992) of this matter begins with the earlier cited sentence, "We live in the realm of meanings," and he ends the first paragraph by writing,

> We experience reality only through the meaning we ascribe to it: not as a "thing in itself" but as something interpreted. It is natural to conclude, there-fore, that this meaning is always more or less unfinished, or incomplete, and even that it can never be altogether right. The realm of meanings is thus the realm of mistakes. (p. 15)

The content of these sentences comes straight from the thought and works of Immanuel Kant. The phrase, "thing in itself," is the English transla-tion of Kant's German "das Ding an sich." Kant used this phrase to refer to the *noumenal* world that lies beyond human experience and observation. Kant thought that the thing-in-itself exists independently of our perception. It constitutes the reality that we are unable to discern. For Kant "the thing in itself" has a reality separate from individual subjectivity, like a Platonic form. Kant tried to show that all human knowledge is subjective and therefore de-pendent upon one's perception and, more importantly, upon one's mode of understanding—reason. *Objectivity* can only be explained and under-stood in terms of the distinction between common sense and private sense because we know only the *phenomenal* world, not the *noumenal* world. Each person's "world" is private to himself or herself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant (1784/1909) was trying to resolve the dilemma between what

is true and what we can only know through mediation of sense percep-
tions and the application of reason. He argued that a gap always remained
between the noumenal world and the phenomenal one. Inasmuch as we
cannot grasp the former, the best we can do is try to understand it by de-
pending, as we must, upon sense perceptions and human understanding.
The only way to cope with our subjective viewpoints is to share and work
together by means of common sense supported by reason. The dilemma is
that neither sense perceptions nor human understanding is ever fully correct
or absolute.

We always work in a state of incomplete knowledge and understanding.
This state of incomplete knowledge is personally discomforting. Courage
is required to cope with incomplete knowledge. This may be why Adler
could feel comfortable using all the alternate meanings and phrases which
he employed when explaining his psychology. Freud with his obsession for
"exactness" and "absoluteness" could never tolerate such a state of mind.
Wolman (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) said, "Freud was never
influenced by Kant" (p. 54).

Adler's grasp of Kant's message argues for using *community feeling* to
address better the subjectivity embodied in private logic and the need for
reason contained in common sense. Adler was comfortable with multiple
meanings. He did not require absolutes. It is said that while innovators are
comfortable with ambiguity, their disciples require absolutes, and the dis-
ciples of disciples extol dogma. In contemporary phraseology, we would
say that Adler could "tolerate ambiguity." Kant said the only solution to
coping with individual subjectivity is human understanding and a sense of
community. Adler emphasized that community feeling requires nurturing
and application to be fully expressed.

## Conclusion

In summary, we find that a great many essential concepts of Adler ac-
tually have their origins in the writings of Kant. Adler was acquainted with
them, and he applied many of them to his psychology. Kant's name was
frequently mentioned in a statement or enclosed in parentheses following a
phrase or sentence to indicate its origin, but sometimes he did not acknowl-
edge this debt.

Adler made considerable use of Kant's ideas in organizing his psy-
chology to understand better personality and explain psychopathology. It
is a historical mistake to assume that Adler developed all these concepts
independently. What Adler did was uniquely apply Kant's ideas to his psy-
chology. The history of ideas is fascinating in that almost every idea has its
origin in the work of an earlier thinker.

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