A FUTURE FOR ADLER'S VISION: CRITICAL COLLABORATION [*]

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By most accounts, Adler's vision of humanity was a precocious and bold critique of human interactions as much as it was a supremely collaborative effort aimed at advancing human potential for better living. Having been invited to speak recently about a possible future for this vision, it seemed appropriate first to take a look at the roots and soil of his futuristic outlook on humanity.

As with all of us, Adler derived his outlook from within his distinct familial perspective. Adler was a second born of five children. The ages and genders of his siblings also placed him psychologically in a bit of a squeeze-play as the second of the first three. And with this comes a peculiar birth right. Think of a second-born you know. Think of his or her (or your?) distinctive outlook on life. What do you expect are the "guiding-lines" for such a child looking into his or her peculiar position in life?

Oscar Christensen speaks of second-borns in terms of an "Avis Complex" due to the "try harder" approach they take to life from behind usually dominant first-borns. The guiding-lines of a second-born allow the person to benefit from the mistakes of others; they compete for their position with corrected information. This is the perspective of the critical observer. But the guiding-lines of a second-born simultaneously allow the person to assist others from an easy-going, no-fear approach - also as a co-operator. This is the perspective of the collaborator. So, the functional guiding-line of the second-born might be described as that of a critical collaborator.

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[*] An earlier version of this article was presented at the May 15, 2004 inauguration of Raymond E. Crossman as the 5th President of the Adler School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, IL, U.S.A.

Individual Psychology (IP), too, has developed within a similar second-born constellation. Historically, IP shined brilliantly during Adler's lifetime, second only to that of Psychoanalysis. It was, however, eclipsed soon after Adler's death, and has to some degree existed in psychological shadows since then (Stepansky, 1983).

I believe I can demonstrate how IP remains most true to its birth right - how it best uses its guiding lines - by playing the critical collaborator, an adaptive, naturally future-oriented role. As part of outlining the trajectory I see for Adler's vision, I want to highlight three particular directions we, Individual Psychologists, have traversed up until today, that no longer promise much effective forward movement:

Direction One: "Leave us alone".

This approach is an already well-delineated, dead-end pathway identified and roundly criticised by *Ansbacher Lecturers* Art Freeman (1999) and Jon Carlson (2000). Simply stated, this is the tendency towards self-satisfaction as an Adlerian enclave and the failure to integrate Adler's ideas into the broader field of clinical research and counselling psychology. Such an approach spells sure death for IP as a national or international influence.

Direction Two: "Give us our due".

Henri Ellenberger (1970) was the first major non-Adlerian to acknowledge how much wisdom has been mined from IP without giving due credit. He believed many respectable psychology-theorists are unacknowledged neo-Adlerians, and suffer from what is called "cryptomnesia" - that is, identifying to such a degree with something one learned (and perhaps even rejected) that later, when formulated in one's own theory, it seems to be an original thought. Many, many Adlerians in writing and in presentations have lamented of "*not being given our due*" (e.g., Edgar, 1996). In fact, Adler recognised this need in his own time. He fought respectfully and vigorously to demonstrate that his dream theory, vastly different from Freud's, pre-dated that of

Alphonse Maeder, which was rising in popularity and shared so much in common with Adler's (Adler, 1913/2003). Still, this backward-glancing represents wasted energy that could be better spent forwarding Adler's vision.

Direction Three: "Acknowledge my Pedigree".

Our past has been guided, even dominated by powerful personalities and by almost quasi-mythical teachers who by sheer force of their personae, have influenced and directed generations of our research and theory development. This era and presence constitute what Thomas Allen (2003) calls "the Golden Age of Adlerian Psychology".

The most notable personality is Dreikurs from whom many, including this esteemed institution[*], claim their lineage. But the same has been done by the Classical Adlerians on the West Coast of the U.S.A., focussing on Adler and his Viennese colleagues who emigrated to America in the 1930's and 1940's; and, to a lesser degree, by the Adlerian Institute on the East Coast, organising its teaching schema around that of Adler's children, Alexandra and Kurt. Forsaking this pathway is not to discount the respect due, and certainly not to succumb to the error of non-attribution to which, I agree, we have often fallen victim.

Still, the future of the vision cannot - and need not - be sustained by taking our ball *(read: theory)* and going home *(read: convention, association, or professional school)*; or by complaining that Adler is not recognised as the originator of so many currents in psychology today; or even less by centring itself around a cluster of powerful personalities - not even Adler's - in this increasingly personality-sceptical age.

What, then, might be a trajectory into the future? Is it at all discernable? Or is it already discernable?

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Of course we can learn from pathways of the past, as long as we are careful to mistake none of them, or their corrected versions for that matter, as the right ways. Rather, by taking a critically collaborative approach to these past directions, and applying that critique to what is already occurring today, we could align ourselves towards a future of continuing contribution. This would mean not retreating into a circumscribed, non-critical and congratulatory posture; but using the various Adlerian professional schools, enclaves that know and respect Adler's theories, as critical think-tanks and research centres. They would examine at necessary depths the connections among IP, current trends and well-researched findings. This way we would not be satisfied to complain about Adler's ideas being purloined, but would critically identify where the given idea fits into a broader, reliable and systemic theory. By not icon-ising our respected psychotherapeutic elders of the first, second, or current generation, but researching their thoughts in a critically clear and meticulous manner to see the first traces of differentiation *(read: growth),* that point the way to a responsible and effective integration within the field of psychology.

And, indeed, whole areas of IP theory are already marking the path into the future. Here, I can only mention a handful. My approach is to highlight four theoretical topics and their practical application. This is done by paralleling quotes from Adlerian and neo-Adlerian sources. Then I note the contribution we, Adlerians, offer to the specific topic and provide a self-critique (precisely as an Adlerian, critically viewing our Adlerian status on the topic). Finally, I suggest areas of collaboration for each topic with those outside IP.

Belonging

> "The interpersonal self is a tool for forming and maintaining relationships with other people. Selves are developed and shaped so as to help connect the person to other people, as well as to society's institutions" (Baumeister et al., 2000, p. 239).

> "The normal person is an individual who lives in society and whose mode of life is so adapted that, whether one wants it or not, society derives a certain advantage from one's work" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, p. 154).
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> "The feeling of belongingness … takes root in the psyche of the child and leaves the individual only under the severest pathological changes of … mental life" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, p. 138).

The concept of belonging is a bedrock contribution of Adlerian theory: Adler created a humanistic understanding of motivation-as-belonging, and belonging as a stable measure of mental health. It is one of the two unifying aspects (along with striving for competence) of his systemic theory. But where is the research to support this foundational theory?

Adlerian Roy Kern and his colleagues are rightly recognised and appreciated for their development and application of the BASIS-A Inventory Interpretive Manual (Kern, Wheeler, Curlette, 1994). The plethora of individual empirical dissertations this spawned has explored dozens of isolated behaviour manifestations and how they compare to this instrument. Still, they do not address the validation of a unified Adlerian theory (including the concept of belonging) within the broader field of psychology. On the other hand, validation has been made of Adler's concept of belonging. It is found in the studies of Roy F. Baumeister (1995, 2000) quoted above. Len Sperry and Paul Peluso (2004) have made this parallel to Adlerian theory known.

How might we support, collaborate with, or otherwise join in this important work? Possibly by revisiting the debate first raised by Bob Powers and Jane Griffith in *Individual Psychology Reporter* (1988a, 1988b) regarding whether "belonging" or "striving" was the more basic concept within IP theory. This could be a critical segue into an even better understanding of the "belongingness" literature. After all, Baumeister found belongingness to be not only a master motivator of positive behaviour, but identified "lack of belonging" as having enough explanatory power of itself to account for most psychological

difficulties and destructive behaviour. This is what Adlerians would call striving on the useless side of life. So, introducing or analysing the current literature on belonging for evidence of that other basic Adlerian construct, "striving", would serve this Adlerian research well - whether or not it supported this tenet.

Parenting

"These relationships early in life may shape the very structures that … allow a coherent view of the world (Siegel, 1999, p. 4). [And as] … relationships early in life shape the structural development of the brain, the mind appears to open to ways in which interpersonal experiences … facilitate development throughout the life span (Siegel, 1999, p. 8). Therefore, the child plays a part in shaping the [very] experiences to which the child's mind must adapt" (Siegel, 1999, p. 19).

"Adolescents raised within a certain parenting style tend to be those who flourish by examining their differences, within a context of connectedness. In this setting the parent is clear about boundaries and consequences but rarely has to use them" (Grotevant & Cooper, 1983, 1986).

"When conflict occurs, it is in the context of support. There is trust that children will stay roughly within the boundaries that have been negotiated" (Baumrind, 1966, 1989).

"The mother is the first other person whom the child experiences. … Here is the first opportunity for the cultivation of the inborn social potentiality" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, p. 372).

"Unfortunately the organisation of the family seems unable to separate itself from the thought of paternal leadership and authority. … If the father is given the task of punishing the children, … it prepares them to regard men as the final authorities and the real powers in life. [This] disturbs the relation of the children with their father, making them fear him instead of feeling him to be a good friend" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, pp. 374-375).

Adlerians are the undisputed leaders in contributing a respectful, non-punitive alternative to rearing children, systematised into a teachable format and advanced into video production, and addressing blended-families, early childhood development, the teen population, alcohol and other drugs, school discipline, and on and on. Perhaps more than in any of our other endeavours, Adlerian parent-education authors are common household terms: Dreikurs (e.g., 1964); Dinkmeyer & McKay (e.g., 1976, 1989); Popkin (e.g., 1983); Nelsen et al., (1996). But where is the research to support such foundational theory?

Where is the systematic exploration into the development of the mind as a social phenomenon? Since few North American Adlerians conduct neurological research, the empirical work to support this contention will probably not come from our ranks. But what of meta-analysis - of the sort Baumeister (1995, 2000) has accomplished - for drawing together brain development research and attachment theory? This, in fact, has been the special project and passion of Daniel J. Siegel (1999). In his book, *The Developing Mind* from which several of the quotes above were drawn, he demonstrates from study after study that proper development of the child's brain and sense-of-self depends on social aspects that the caregiver stimulates; and thereby opens to the child a world of ever-widening, social proportions.

Even though a good amount of research has been accomplished on our own parent programmes, Adlerian research focusses almost exclusively on the teaching format rather than on careful observation of already effective parenting styles to see what accounts for the ensuing resiliency in children. It is Diana Baumrind who has done this meticulous observation. Her longitudinal research (Baumrind e.g., 1966, 1968, 1989), from which I was also quoting above, has been recognised practically by as many psychological associations as there are members in our Adlerian professional organisations combined. It is hard, if not impossible, to distinguish her "authoritative parenting style" from the democratic style advocated in our parenting literature.

A serious challenge and opportunity for collaboration presents itself here: for Adlerians to incorporate this knowledge into our parenting and counselling protocols. Regarding developmental theory and IP, our own Richard Kopp (2004) has begun the work to understand, developmentally, Life Style across the life cycle. But already Siegel has co-authored a very important parenting book, *Parenting from the Inside Out* (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003) based on his empirical findings. So, among others, Baumrind and Siegel present strong, valid and sympathetic challenges to our pre-eminence in the parenting field. Our own parenting approach does not need to be reformed as much as to be re-informed by the empirical literature.

Purposive Emotions

> "From an evolutionary foundation, human behaviour is considered relative to the task of survival and reproduction. ... Relying on … an evolutionary explanation for emotional expression … the adaptive purpose of emotional expression becomes clear. Emotions help humans to orchestrate their interactions with the world in a way that maximises positive emotional experiences …" (Rasmussen, 2003b, pp. 389 & 405).
> "We must think that this is a question of something primordial, of something that was inherent in primeval life" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, p. 106): "[That, in order to survive,] we must connect our thought with a continuous active adaptation to the demands of the outer world if we are to understand the direction and movement of life" (ibid., p. 106).
> "The element of thought cannot be detached from the structure of the whole psychic make-up, which includes feelings as well. Whenever one conceives an idea, one arouses in the self also a series of corresponding feelings and emotions" (Adler, 1964, p.124).

IP provides a deeply holistic contribution to the understanding of emotions, cognitions and volitions; understood as a unified motivation for survival. But where is the research to support such foundational theory?

To date, among Adlerians, there is no systematic research into the biological or evolutionary basis and aims of emotions. However, Adlerian Paul Rasmussen (2003) whom I have quoted above shows this is precisely the work accomplished by emotion-theorists, like N. H. Frijda (1986, 1994), author of *The Emotions* (1986), Leda Cosmides (2000) and John Tooby (2004) who are leaders in evolutionary psychology. These authors have been demystifying emotions by showing that emotional adaptation, what Adlerians know as purposiveness, has been evolving from our prehistoric ancestors up until today.

The very term "evolutionary psychology" should sound very familiar to Individual Psychologists. Rasmussen (2003a, 2003b) has been collaboratively assembling evidence from this field into a number of practical articles, with the intent of demonstrating that work with emotions can be as fruitful as the more common work Adlerians do with cognitions.

Spirituality

> "The study of spirituality is willing to admit, even embrace, the superiority of holistic approaches … that reject the matter-spirit, nature-culture, subject-object dichotomies. … It acknowledges the integration of the human into a universe that is not dead matter but living organism … and its ideal of understanding is less control, prediction, and domination than mutuality and relationship in wholeness" (Schneiders, 1998, p. 10).
> "Religious faith *is* alive and will continue to live *until it is replaced* by this most profound insight ([i.e.,] the recognition of interconnectedness … which … proves that virtue is teachable) and the religious feeling which stems from it … which was meant

to bind human beings more closely to one another. It must be regarded as the heritage of evolution, as the result of the upward struggle in the evolutionary urge" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956/1964, p. 462).

There is a body of Adlerian literature contributing to the study of religion and spirituality starting from Adler's own work with Lutheran pastor, Ernst Jahn (Jahn & Adler, 1933), up to today's development of criteria for measuring the relative wellness of spiritual experience (Mansager, 2000; Mansager et al., 2002). Adler's work with Jahn is a strikingly clear summary of his major positions as they can be applied to religious individuals. In fact, according to Jones and Butman's (1991) *Comprehensive Christian Appraisal of Modern Psychotherapies*, IP is the most adaptable psychological system for working within a religious or spiritual framework (Watts, 2000, p. 319). But, utility aside, where is the research to support such claims?

While a good amount of writing has occurred in the area of applying IP principles to pastoral psychology and counselling, it continues (for better and worse) to emphasise the relationship with Christianity, rather than other religions or the broader underlying issues of a secular spirituality. Scholars of spirituality as an academic field, most notably Sandra Schneiders (1989, 1998) from whom I have quoted above, have specifically invited psychologies of a holistic-bent to provide insight into spirituality from a social science perspective.

Individual Psychologists can collaboratively show a way to understand holistically the non-theistic potential of spirituality - something extremely beneficial to the religious and non-religious alike. The psychology of religion literature is vast, and Individual Psychologists should continue the effort to understand religion and spirituality from a critically collaborative perspective. The clinical psychology of religion is ripe for meta-analysis, and for verifying (or falsifying) Adler's mental health understanding of religious faith.

Conclusion

What might be the future of Adler's vision? To give itself away critically and collaboratively - that is, its contributions of methods, conceptualisation and its insights. It is precisely not to hold our vision away from and above the market place, nor to gnash our teeth about others stealing our ideas, nor to retrench or retreat into a Golden Age.

No, our future potential is well matched to be one of service. We do well to expend ourselves freely in this endeavour, to contribute out of concern for our Adlerian community and our professional community, which both serve the greater human community. It is a natural way for us, this path of critically collaborating; it is a birth-right and a guide, within which we find our own interests are served best by serving the interest of others.

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