



# Remembering Alfred Adler: Psychology, Purpose and Meaning

DAVID J. CAREY, PSYCHOLOGIST, DIRECTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, CITY  
COLLEGES, DEAN, COLLEGE OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

# Alfre Adler 1870-1937

- ▶ Contemporary of Freud
- ▶ Invited to Psychoanalytic Society in 1902
- ▶ Freud's chosen successor for head of Psychoanalytic Society
- ▶ President of Vienna Psychoanalytic Society-1910
- ▶ Split with Freud in 1911
- ▶ Was never a "pupil" of Freud, a colleague of Freud
- ▶ Had no enmity with Freud, admired his work always
- ▶ Brought psychology to the people
- ▶ Died Aberdeen Scotland, 1937



# Basic Concepts of Adlerian Theory

- ▶ People are understood in their social context
- ▶ Stressed the importance of parent education
- ▶ Underscored the equality of men and women
- ▶ People have one basic desire/goal: to belong and feel Significant
- ▶ A holistic theory-unified personality
- ▶ No "parts" but a whole
- ▶ Subjectivity: we make sense of life, create meaning from life
- ▶ The sense and meaning is largely, often wholly, unknown to us
- ▶ All life is lived forward

# Synopsis of Adlerian Theory

- ▶ All life is a unity of purpose, goal striving and movement
- ▶ Human beings are a unified whole
- ▶ Life is lived forward towards a final goal
- ▶ The final goal is fictional, created in childhood
- ▶ We strive to significance, to overcome inferiority
- ▶ We are self-determined, not pushed by primal forces
- ▶ We have creative power, we create our life style
- ▶ Social interest is the cornerstone of mental health
- ▶ The rebellious and oppositional person contributes to society



# Seven Major Tenets of Adlerian Theory

- ▶ 1. Unity of the individual
  - ▶ Thinking, feeling and behaviour are subordinate to the life style
  - ▶ It's the pattern of how we deal with life
  - ▶ There are no internal divisions or conflicting forces

## 2. Goal Orientation

- ▶ Forward movement throughout life
- ▶ Striving for significance
- ▶ Influence of heredity and culture



# 3. Self-determination & Uniqueness

- ▶ Heredity and culture influence the final goal
- ▶ Childhood important
- ▶ Guiding lines of final goal formed here
- ▶ Out of awareness (before language develops)
- ▶ Goal striving springs from creative power of the individual

# 4. Social Context

- ▶ Person is an indivisible whole, a system within other systems
- ▶ Family
- ▶ Community
- ▶ Humanity
- ▶ Planet
- ▶ cosmos



# 5. Feeling of Community

- ▶ Gemeinschaftsgefühl-"community feeling"
- ▶ A personal narrative created to cope with the world
- ▶ Can be "useful" or "useless"
- ▶ Useful-cooperation OR rebellion
- ▶ Useless-neuroses, anxiety, depression, delinquency
- ▶ To live in harmony with society-not to conform is one way

# 6. Mental health

- ▶ Connectedness
- ▶ Contribution
- ▶ Community feeling
- ▶ Striving for significant on the useful side
- ▶ Cooperation
- ▶ No concept of an “isolated” individual
- ▶ [Even a hermit needs a community from which to withdraw]



# 7. Treatment

- ▶ Respectful Socratic dialogues
- ▶ Did away with the couch
- ▶ First psychologist to set up two facing chairs
- ▶ Viewed patients as “students”
- ▶ Gave homework
- ▶ Emphasised early life recollections
- ▶ Look at belief systems
- ▶ Questioned and disputed them

# Conclusion

- ▶ Adler is the father of all contemporary psychology
- ▶ Maslow tributes him
- ▶ Ellis tributes him
- ▶ CBT descends from Adler
- ▶ Dialectical behaviour therapy descends from Adler
- ▶ The “forgotten prophet”



# Adler Quotes

- ▶ “It is the individual who is not interested in his fellow men who has the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. It is from among such individuals that all human failures spring.”

# Adler Quotes

- ▶ We are not determined by our experiences, but are self-determined by the meaning we give to them; and when we take particular experiences as the basis for our future life, we are almost certain to be misguided to some degree. Meanings are not determined by situations. We determine ourselves by the meanings we ascribe to situations.



# Adler Quotes

- ▶ Follow your heart but take your brain with you.

# Adler Quotes

- ▶ Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations.
- ▶ It is very obvious that we are not influenced by "facts" but by our interpretation of the facts.



# Adler Quotes

- ▶ An educator's most important task, one might say his holy duty, is to see to it that no child is discouraged at school, and that a child who enters school already discouraged regains his self-confidence through his school and his teacher. This goes hand in hand with the vocation of the educator, for education is possible only with children who look hopefully and joyfully upon the future.

# Adler Quotes

- ▶ Every pampered child becomes a hated child.... There is no greater evil than the pampering of children.



# Adler Quotes

- ▶ It is always easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.

# Adler Quotes

- ▶ The chief danger in life is that you may take too many precautions.
- ▶ It is well known that those who do not trust themselves never trust others.



# Adler Quotes

- ▶ No experience is a cause of success or failure. We do not suffer from the shock of our experiences, so-called trauma, but we make out of them just what suits our purposes.

# What is “psychology”?

- ▶ Ψυχή (psyche)-spirit or soul, most often translated as soul
- ▶ Λόγος-(logos)-the logic, premise, behind an argument



Think about it!

“The problem with most people is they are alive and don't know what to do about it.” William Saroyan