

SUBJECTIVE ADAPTATIONALISM: AN ADLERIAN METAPSYCHOLOGY

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In this article an attempt will be made to show how the main lines of Adler's theory of personality and psychopathology can be developed within a particular philosophical view of the nature of man. For purposes of brief reference, that view might be called subjective adaptationalism.

We wish to suggest, in effect, that the subjective adaptational view of man can serve as a metapsychology for Adlerian theory. We consider it likely that this subjective adaptational metapsychology was strongly operative in the historical development of Adler's theory, and in his disagreements with Freud. The point at this time, however, is not to perform an historical analysis of Adler's conceptualizations, nor even to claim that this metapsychology was explicit in Adler's mature theory but, rather, to show that subjective adaptationalism can serve the logical function of a metapsychology for Adlerian theory. That is, the point is to show that subjective adaptationalism can serve as a framework for systematizing, revising, and extending Adlerian theory in ways that are consistent with the realities of the human condition and with Adler's basic orientations.

Although Freudian metapsychology is an explicit focus of consideration among analytic writers, a concern with metapsychology has been much less evident within Adlerian theory. There would seem to be at least two good reasons for this difference: (a) Freud gave more explicit attention to his metapsychology than did Adler; and (b) Freud's metapsychology is highly problematic, being directly contradicted by clinical experience (Schafer, 1976; Wachtel, 1973; Yankelovich & Barrett, 1970), while Adler's is not. Thus, like Freudian metapsychology, this Adlerian metapsychology provides a framework for organizing and extending the underlying theory; unlike Freudian metapsychology, it is true to human nature.

We recognize that the term "metapsychology" itself has been largely restricted to psychoanalytic writings, but there seems to be no good reason to perpetuate such lexical imperialism nor, similarly, to continue to ignore the metapsychological task facing Adlerian

theory. An examination of Adlerian metapsychology must at some point be undertaken in the ongoing development of Adlerian theory.

Subjective Adaptationalism

Man is a biological animal, a product of evolution. As such, each human being is characterized by (a) interactions with the environment, and (b) adaptations to the environment. Interactions with the environment are continuous, even, in rudimentary form, during sleep. They proceed by way of material, energy, and informational flows between the organism and the environment. They are determined, within the organism, by goal-directed foundations for interaction that are implicit in the neural-psychological structure of that organism. Such determining foundations for interaction are sometimes called control structures. The concern here is not with the nature of such foundations so much as with the fact that such foundations for interaction do exist: control structures are simply the interaction determining aspects of the dynamic organization of the organism.

Adaptations to the environment are not strictly speaking continuous, but they are intrinsic to the nature of organism-environment interactions: the control structures for interactions are constructed by, and only by, adaptational processes. Adaptations proceed by way of tentative changes in the control structure foundations for interactions, which changes tend to be retained insofar as they promote the successful completion of those interactions—the successful maintenance of homeostatic balance, the successful attainment of goals. In this sense, adaptation at the level of the individual, as at the level of the species, proceeds by evolutionary variation and selection, by creative trial and error, by trying things and keeping those which work (Campbell, 1974; Popper, 1965). Thus, from this adaptational perspective we have a framework consisting of three basic conceptualizations: (a) continuous goal-directed interaction between organism and environment,¹ (b) organismic control structure foundations for those interactions, and (c) construction of those foundations via creative variation and adaptational selection.

¹The demonstration that such interactions are, and must be, fundamentally goal-oriented is an important topic of its own. The basic arguments are that (a) all such interactions are ultimately subordinate to individual and species survival, (b) some cognitive processes of which humans are clearly capable are logically not possible except with goal-directed foundations, and (c) learning requires goal definitions in order for “correct” and “incorrect” to be defined in learning trials—without goal criteria, any rule for behavior is just as good as any other.

Man is also a subjective animal, a creature of experiencing, action, and meaning. His subjectivity, however, is not in opposition to his biological nature, nor is it simply an addition to it. A person's subjectivity is a part of, an aspect of, his interactive adaptational biological nature. A human being's subjective experiencing, therefore, partakes of the same threefold conceptual framework of goal-directed interaction, organismic interactive foundations, and construction via creative variation and adaptational selection. Roughly speaking, within this subjective experiential perspective, goal-directed organism-environment interactions are viewed as the goal-directed activities of the individual in an environment; the foundations for such activity are the beliefs and goals from which that activity derives; and the adaptive processes are the processes of adaptive learning. This three-part framework forms the core of subjective adaptationalism.

In developing the outlines of Adler's theory within this framework, we will first focus on the fundamental interactive *processes* and their characteristics; then on the critical aspects of the interactive *foundations*; and thirdly on some of the critical distinctions in the environment within which those interactions and adaptations take place. The distinction between interactions and adaptations was not well made by Adler, and we will find that making that distinction helps clarify some otherwise confusing aspects of Adler's theory. Adler's conceptualization of psychopathology will be addressed after this initial outline of his basic psychology.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROCESSES OF HUMAN ACTIVITY

The Striving for Superiority

Intrinsic in the interactions and adaptations of the basic biological perspective is the inherent tendency of the organism to engage the environment, to maintain homeostatic stability in it, to accomplish goals in it, and to adapt its procedures so as to become even more competent in such interactions. That is, intrinsic in the biological perspective is the striving for competence in the environment, for mastery of the environment, that is inherent in all living things. When this inherent characteristic is considered in its subjective form, we have, precisely, Adler's striving for superiority.

The originators of the concept of evolution . . . have pointed out

that life must be understood as *movement toward a goal*, and that this goal—the preservation of the individual and the species—is attained through the overcoming of resistances with which the environment confronts the organism. Thus *mastery of the environment* appears to be inseparably connected with the concept of evolution. If this striving were not innate to the organism, no form of life could preserve itself.

The goal of mastering the environment in a superior way, which one can call the striving for perfection consequently also characterizes the development of man. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 39, Adler's emphasis)

The striving for perfection is innate as something which belongs to live, a striving, an urge, a developing, a something without which one could not even conceive of life. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 31)

This coercion to carry out a better adaptation can never end (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 32, original in italics).

It is to be noted that, from this perspective, the striving for superiority is not a motivation in the sense of a drive or an intention. It is, rather, an intrinsic characteristic of living things. It is a dynamic framework within which all particular motivations arise. "When [Adler] named a master motive, it was actually only to describe the form which the life force takes in man" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 29, editors' comment).

In this sense, no particular motive can ever counter or contradict the striving for superiority: all particular motives arise as particular versions of the striving for superiority. Thus, all motivation manifests that striving, embodies it. However, though it is true that all motivation, all interaction, all adaptation, embodies the striving for superiority, it is also true that particular versions of that striving can be in error. It is guaranteed in the nature of man that he tries for mastery, for perfection, for superiority; there is no such guarantee that he succeeds, nor even that he searches in a correct or fruitful direction.

Inferiority Feelings

As the activity of the individual engages the environment, it encounters resistances. The environment is not automatically conformed or conformable to organismic interactions, but must instead be approached with appropriate interactive problem solving skills. In a particular case, such skills may be already available in the individual's interactive competencies, that is, in the interactive

foundations that have already been constructed, or they may have to be sought in the construction of new competencies via adaptational learning. In either case, the individual's recognition of, or definition of, a resistance from the environment constitutes a recognition of inferiority, of incompleteness, relative to that environment. The general tendency to mastery of the environment is thus given specific direction by such a specific recognition of inferiority or incompleteness. Accordingly, from this perspective, Adler's concept of inferiority feeling refers to specific motivationally directed versions of the striving for superiority. Inferiority feelings are the motivational versions of the inherent movement toward mastery; they are the orientations toward specific "minus situations."

A Differentiation

There arises at this point an apparent problem that must be faced. It would seem clear that as the general striving for superiority encounters environmental resistances, it gives rise to specific feelings of inferiority, to specific motivational intentions. Upon reflection, however, it is not so clear how a resistance can be defined or recognized except with respect to an already existent goal, an already formed intention: a resistance to what? Thus, resistances give rise to goals, but, conversely, resistances must arise from goals. There would appear to be a problem here of either a circularity, in which a particular resistance and a particular goal define each other, together arising out of nowhere, or of an infinite regress, in which a goal arises out of a resistance, which arises out of some other goal, which arises out of still another resistance, and so on.

The problem is only apparent, but its dissolution requires a somewhat more sophisticated argument than has been developed to this point. Interactions have been considered to be motivated with respect to definitions of interactive goals. Approaches to such goals must be sensitive to environmental conditions (resistances), and may well give rise to subordinate goals. Thus, we have goals which encounter resistances, thus giving rise to inferiority feelings, thus giving rise to subordinate goals. This much is unexceptionable. The problem is to find a highest level goal, or some equivalent yielder of resistances, thus stopping the regress, that is not circularly defined.

The solution rests upon a distinction between goals of organism-environment interactions and the goal of the adaptive learning process. Interactive goals are about the environment; encounter resis-

tances from the environment; and, most importantly, arise from resistances from the environment. Adaptational goals are not about the environment; thus they do not arise from resistances from the environment. The goal of adaptation is the maintenance of a certain stability or equilibrium *internal to the organism*. Such an adaptive goal of self-regulation does not *arise* from encounters with the environment, but is rather intrinsic to the nature of life. It does, however, *encounter* resistances from the environment, since such an equilibrium is a relationship with the environment, and is thus open to disturbances from the environment. Such resistances give rise to adaptational constructions of goal-directed foundations for interaction, which restore the basic equilibrium, but may encounter still further interactive resistances when actually carried out, thus giving rise to still further goals. The circularity, therefore, is broken.

We arrive, then, at a hierarchical picture in which the *adaptive* goal of dynamic equilibrium encounters resistances from the environment, constructs *interactional* goals to overcome those resistances, which may encounter still further resistances, leading to the construction of subordinate interactive goals, etc. Thus, at a rather simple level, we have the example of hunger, which disturbs interactive and adaptive equilibrium, leads to the construction of goals of eating, which lead further to subordinate goals involving hunting (or purchasing), cooking, etc. The earlier apparent impasse is broken because the generator of the hierarchy, the adaptive goal of dynamic equilibrium, does not itself arise from a resistance but, nevertheless, encounters resistances, thus beginning the goal-resistance-goal pattern from which the hierarchy is derived.

An additional point needs to be made concerning this goal of adaptation. The equilibrium that is sought is not a static equilibrium of parts or pieces: it is not a thermodynamic equilibrium. It is a dynamic equilibrium of the organism-environment interactions; it is the maintenance of the well-definedness of those interactions from the organism's perspective. If an interaction proceeds in a manner that was not in some sense anticipated as a possibility by the organism, then that well-definedness is disturbed, and adaptive constructions are initiated.²

²Adaptive processes, thus, are essentially similar to Piaget's equilibration (Piaget, 1971; Appel & Goldberg, 1977) both in their general conceptualizations and in their biological base. A formal model of such processes and their relations to other aspects of psychology is begun in Bickhard (in press, a, b).

It is clear that the environment is always presenting us with novelty; thus that dynamic equilibrium is being disturbed and new adaptive construction is taking place. The adaptive goal of dynamic equilibrium, therefore, gives rise to progressive and ever-present variation-and-selection constructions of new competencies. That is, adaptation gives rise to progressive growth and development.³

It would seem apparent at this point that, with this understanding of the goal of adaptation, we have arrived full circle back at Adler's striving for superiority, though with a more differentiated conceptualization of it. In effect, we have found that the basic pattern of goal-resistance-inferiority feeling-goal must be differentiated with respect to the two levels of internal processes—interactive processes and adaptive processes—and that that basic pattern takes on somewhat different forms at the two levels. In particular, (a) there is only one goal at the adaptive level—that of dynamic equilibrium; (b) that goal is not a consequent of resistance—though it gives rise to resistances—but is, rather, intrinsic to the nature of life; and (c) the goal of adaptation yields the construction of the foundations for interaction, including, in particular, hierarchies of interactive goals. Adler's striving for superiority would seem to refer most strongly to the adaptive level, but to make use of an interactive level version of the basic pattern. It seems likely that he would like to have encompassed both levels, but the necessary differentiations between them were not available.⁴

Creativity

It is to be noted that one of the primary tenets of Adlerian psychology—the creativity of the individual in constructing his subjective world—is implicit in the variation and selection organization of the adaptive processes. In particular, the tentative variations in the foundations for interactions are the creative constructions of each individual. The influence of the environment is felt in two

³In addition, it is also clear that human beings seek novelty: in the creative variation and adaptational selection of the adaptive process, there is a selection for procedures which tend to activate that adaptational process, that is, for procedures whose interactions tend to encounter or create still further novelty.

⁴Inferiority feelings too would seem to be applicable to both levels, but most strongly to the adaptive level. That is, the concept would seem to be most strongly applicable to the recognition of resistances which lead to the adaptive construction of new competencies, but not inappropriately applicable to the experiencing of resistances which call upon already constructed competencies.

senses: (a) the environment is a participant in the process of selecting which of those tentative constructions are to be retained, in determining which of those constructions contribute to dynamic interactive equilibrium; and (b) those constructions will in general be founded upon prior constructions which have been similarly influenced by the environment. This progressive creative construction in conjunction with environmental selection pressures provide an explicit model for Adler's "soft determinism" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 89): the selection pressures influence, but do not cause or determine, the construction of the individual's subjective reality. Adler expresses the subjective variation and selection adaptive process with great exactitude in "the child . . . proceeds by trying out the situation, by tentative estimates, until he finds an approximately satisfactory way" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 293).

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUNDATIONS FOR HUMAN ACTIVITY

Goals

The foundations for human activity constitute the individual's subjective world. Those foundations—thus that subjective world—are constructed by and organized within the basic striving for superiority. They are constructed as the individual experiences particular inferiority feelings in his encounters with the world, and are organized with the goals of overcoming those resistances. ". . . to be a human being means to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses toward its own conquest" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 116).

Such interactive goals can, in turn, encounter their own resistances and thus lead to the construction of subordinate interactive goals. Therefore, these goals clearly form a hierarchy of some kind within the striving for superiority, within the fundamental adaptive goal of dynamic equilibrium, of interactive competence. An important Adlerian concept derives from a consideration of the nature of this hierarchical structure of interactive goals.

The *adaptive* goal of interactive competence forms the highest-level goal in this general hierarchy: it constitutes the encompassing striving for superiority. It is not necessarily the case, however, that there would be any single highest-level, encompassing, *interactive* goal. It seems a strong likelihood, in fact, that there will be multiple

highest-level interactive goals, corresponding to multiple basic resistances and consequent inferiority feelings that the individual has encountered.

This likelihood of multiple highest-level interactive goals raises the important possibility of conflict of purpose among these most basic goals. There will, in general, be no conflict between a goal and its subordinate goals, but these highest-level interactive goals, though each constructed within the striving for superiority—the single adaptive goal—are not subordinated to each other (otherwise they would not be highest-level goals), and thus do not have that assurance of consistency. Such a conflict of basic interactive goals within a single individual would be highly incapacitating and would likely yield something akin to the infinite oscillation behavior of a computer that has been fed a contradiction: no resolution or decision of such a conflict is possible at the interactive level. Such a conflict would also be antithetical to the basic Adlerian premise of the unity of the individual.

A consistency among basic interactive goals is, in fact, assured, but not by the constraint of subordination: multiple basic, or highest-level, goals are, by definition, not mutually subordinated. The consistency derives from a consideration of the constructive origins of such goals. In particular, each goal is constructed or created in the context of all of its predecessors. Furthermore, basic interactive goals are not constructed all at once and out of nothing: the adaptive process of variations and selections is constituted by variations *on what is already present*. Thus, new goals are not simply constructed in the context of those already created; new goals are the evolutionary descendants of those already created. The consistency among basic interactive goals, therefore, is not one of subordination but, rather, one of evolutionary lineage.⁵

This thematic consistency among an individual's interactive goals would manifest itself in a consistency in that individual's activity. It would manifest itself as a consistency or convergence of direction—of purpose—in that activity. The principle of such consistency—the metaphoric point of such convergence—therefore,

⁵The exact nature of such evolutionary consistency, especially as it manifests itself in such "subjective evolution," is a fascinating and important topic, but one that will not be pursued here. Some feel for its complexity (in a different area of psychology) is conveyed by Lewis and Rosenblum (1977).

would seem to be the obvious candidate for Adler's concept of the fictional final goal. "While all psychological movements derive their direction from a predetermined goal, all the . . . separate goals . . . ~~come under the dominance of the fictional final goal~~" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 94).

Assumptions

Goal-directed—or purposive—systems require some set of assumptions about the world, and about their current situation in the world, in addition to their goal definitions in order to yield any behavior. If, for example, you are hungry and have a consequent goal of eating, your behavior will differ quite noticeably depending on whether you are in your living room or are in the middle of a forest.

Clearly an individual's conceptualizations of his current actual situation will be consonant with and in terms of his conceptualizations of what kinds of situations are possible. One will hardly conceive of oneself as being in a forest (or a living room) if one has no idea what a forest (or a living room) is. An individual's assumptions about what is possible and likely in the world, therefore, form the context and the constituents within which and out of which that individual constructs his view of the world. "It is through his schema of apperception that every individual lives in a subjective world" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 184).

There are, therefore, two related levels of the consideration: (a) the individual's understanding of his *current* situation, his subjective world; and (b) the assumptions about the world⁶ that ground and form such situational understandings, his schema of apperception. The two levels correspond exactly with the distinction between a goal (or assumption) as activated in a current interaction, and a goal (or assumption) as constructed and available in the general foundations for interactions.

Adler quite clearly understood the necessary functions of an individual's assumptions in generating that individual's activity in the world, referring to those assumptions with a variety of terms, such as schema, private logic, basic opinions, world picture, etc.⁷ He also

⁶Including value-laden assumptions, i.e., attitudes.

⁷Adler did not, however, always maintain a clear distinction between the two levels of assumptions.

understood that these assumptions are constructed by the creativity of the individual just as much as are the goals: all interaction foundations are constructed by creative variation and adaptive selection. "It is not the child's experiences which dictate his actions; it is the conclusions while he draws from his experiences" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 209). "Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 208).

Assumptions and Goals

It is clear that the consistency of context and evolutionary descent that we found among the individual's goals must also exist among that individual's assumptions and, most important for current purposes, between his assumptions and goals. We have seen that assumptions are operative in the current view of the situation in which they influence the *choice* or *selection* of subordinate goals in an ongoing interaction, e.g., the effects of forest or living room on subordinate goals toward eating. It is also the case, however, that assumptions at the level of schema for apperception influence the very *construction* of subordinate goals: it is nonsensical to conceive of the construction of a potential interactive goal of opening a refrigerator door if there are no assumptions concerning the potential existence and usefulness of refrigerators. In other words, a resistance must be recognized—an inferiority feeling must be experienced—before it makes sense to construct a goal to overcome it, and that very conceptualization of the resistance—of the inferiority—will involve assumptions about the world.

This logical and constructive priority of assumptions over subordinate interactive goals raises the question of priority with respect to the basic or highest-level interactive goals—with respect to the thematic constituents of the fictional final goal. Put simply, is an individual's world view logically prior, therefore developmentally prior, to his fictional final goal?

This question does not seem to have been explicitly addressed by Adler, but we can arrive at an answer from consideration of the internal logic of the model. We have already noted that the highest-level interactive goals are constructed with respect to resistances to the basic striving for superiority. These resistances must themselves be conceptualized, must be part of the individual's subjective reality; thus, we have a logical and developmental priority of assump-

tions (world view) over goals for all interactive goals, including the fictional final goal. The sole exception to this priority of assumptions over goals is the adaptive goal of the striving for superiority, which does not arise from a resistance, but is, instead, an intrinsic characteristic of living things. Thus, within the context of the overarching striving for superiority, the constituents of the individual's world view and of his fictional final goal will be created in mutual context and consistency, but there will be some basic foundations of the world view that will also form the foundations of the fictional final goal.

Movement

The activity of the individual is the basic foundation for understanding that individual. The activity is epistemologically fundamental; it is our only source of information. "The raw material with which the Individual Psychologist works is the *relationship* of the individual to the problems of the outside world" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 67).

Adler spoke of that activity, as it is structured and organized by the individual, as that individual's law of movement. The law of movement, in fact, is not just the activity of the individual but, rather, that activity in its special epistemological role as the foundation of understanding. That is, an individual's law of movement is that individual's activity as it manifests the underlying organization of its own foundations.

Movement, in general, will be determined by the assumptions and goals of the individual as he interactively engages the environment. The organization that is revealed in the law of movement, then, is that of the individual's world view and fictional final goal, the organization of the foundations for interaction. The law of movement, in other words, is the expression of assumption and goal direction in the individual's activity. "Movement, the basic law of all life, and consequently also of psychological life, cannot be thought of without goal and direction" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 52). ". . . the chief characteristic of a movement is that it must have direction and, therefore, a goal" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 67).

It is clear that much of the goal direction of an individual's activity is provided by the explicit hierarchy of interactive goals in the foundations for interaction. The law of movement, however, captures more than his collectivity of interactive goals. Through time, the

individual not only exercises goal-directed competencies; he also constructs new ones. Such new competencies will be expressed in future activity. The construction of such new competencies by the striving for superiority will be consonant with the already extant world view and fictional final goal; it will extend them in fact, but will be no more fully determined by them than is any other creative construction of the individual. The direction of an individual's movement, then, will be given not only by the already extant interactive goals of that individual, but also by the consistent direction of the construction of new goals, of new competencies. That is, the direction of an individual's movement is given not only by the interactive direction of the individual's activity, but also by the adaptive direction of the individual's striving for superiority. The law of movement refers to the individual's activity as it reveals both forms of direction.⁸

Life Style

We have seen that the individual's world view, his fictional final goal, and his direction of development of the two, as revealed in the law of movement, will all three manifest the consistency of their common and mutually foundational evolutionary descent. "This unity [". . . in thinking, feeling, acting, . . ."] we call the 'life style' of the individual" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 69).

Lifestyle, then, is constituted by the individual's world view, fictional final goal, and the adaptational direction that these two provide to the striving for superiority.⁹ It is not, however, constituted out of them in the sense of pieces of a jigsaw puzzle or components of a machine. The subjective world is one of meanings and experiencings, not of parts and components. Assumptions, goals, and inferiority feelings are all organizations of meanings, not of substances or places,¹⁰ and they blend together, rather than fit together,

⁸Movement per se would actually seem to be Adler's term for the interactive activity of the individual. Thus, this discussion might seem to belong in the earlier section on processes. The law of movement, however, refers to more than that, and could not be adequately mentioned until assumptions and goals had already been addressed. Thus, this discussion is located under "foundations."

⁹Another way to express this adaptational direction is to note that the world view and fictional final goal, together, define the basic orientation of any future inferiority feelings out of which any future assumptions and goals will be constructed.

¹⁰Substances and places form the basic foundational assumptions of Freudian metapsychology.

into the unity of the life style. The life style, then, is a thematic unity, constituted of themes and aspects rather than parts. The life style is the basic orientation toward meaning in an individual's living.

Note that just as the life style is not statically composed of pieces or things, so also it itself is not a static thing. As the meaning of the world view and goal are being continuously *manifested* in the individual's movement by the flow of the interactive activity, so, ipso facto, is the life style. As the meanings of the world view and goal are being progressively *elaborated* within the individual's movement—by the constructions of the striving for superiority—so, ipso facto, is the life style. The life style is an orientation toward meaning in life that is evidenced in movement and founded upon the world view and the fictional final goal.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMAN ACTIVITY

Consonance and Harmony

The goal-directed foundations for interaction in the individual are formed by the constructive variations of the adaptive process and the selection pressures from the environment. We have seen that this imposes an internal thematic unity on the interactive assumptions and goals, manifested in the world view and the fictional final goal, respectively. The potential relationships between these goal-directed systems and the environments within which they arise and function remains to be examined.

First of all, it seems clear that a goal-directed system must have some competence in approaching its goals in order to have ever arisen out of the variation and selection construction process. Goal-directed systems arise as general means (as in "means-ends") for overcoming resistances that higher-level systems might encounter and, correspondingly, they can be expected to have some efficacy as means. Beyond the assurance of some such minimal level, however, the creative variation and environmental selection construction process provides no guarantee of any particular level of competence as means, certainly not of any maximal possible level. Thus, the various means that an individual has available will, in general, be of varying degrees of competence, and of varying deficiencies relative to what might be possible.

Exactly the same reasoning and conclusions apply to the efficacies of those means relative to the ends for which they are invoked. That is, even if a particular means is highly efficacious in itself, it may nevertheless have varying degrees of appropriateness for the ends which it serves. Thus, both the means and the means-ends relationships in an individual's foundations for interaction can be expected to have varying degrees of efficacy (above some minimum) relative to the environment. The environmental efficacy of the means and means-end relationships in an individual's goal and world view structures will be called the *consonance* of those structures and, thus, of that individual's life style.

There is still one more competence relationship that will show varying degrees of efficacy above some minimum, again by the same reasoning concerning variation and selection construction processes as before. This third relationship concerns the ends of the means-ends relationships. In particular, an end may be highly consonant when considered in itself and with respect to whatever higher ends it serves, but still manifest a disharmony with other ends (that it does not serve) in the sense that accomplishment of the given end is disruptive or obstructive to accomplishment of those other ends. This issue of *harmony* among ends is of particular importance among the highest-level interactive goals comprising the fictional final goal.¹¹ We have seen that the evolutionary lineage among these highest-level goals guarantees a thematic unity of meaning, but it assures only a minimum level of pragmatic harmony among them. Thus, although they share a common constructive lineage and the common assumptions of the world view, they may, nevertheless, in varying degrees, work against each other out in the world. Thematic unity does not assure pragmatic harmony.

Levels of Reality

We will be considering issues of consonance and harmony as they relate to physical, social, and existential levels of reality. The nature of, and relationships among, these levels are of interest in themselves, but will not be of primary focus in this discussion. It will

¹¹The three levels of concern with means, means-end relationships, and ends, correspond roughly with C. S. Pierce's (the founder of pragmatism) levels of logic, ethics, and esthetics (Bernstein, 1971; Potter, 1967). Concern with means (logic) and means-end relationships (ethics) have been combined in the concept of consonance because Adler's concerns (as will be discussed) seem to be best characterized as having focused on harmony (esthetics).

suffice to note that each level forms the ontological context for the next level; that is, each level forms the context within which the next level exists. Conversely, each level forms the epistemological context for the preceding level; this is, human beings necessarily view each level from the perspective of the one above it. Thus, the ontological subsumptions and the epistemological subsumptions among the levels occur in opposite directions.

Physical Reality

Issues of consonance and harmony with physical reality are seldom of as much concern to the psychologist (and the individual involved) as with other levels of reality. This is perhaps because those issues tend to be somewhat clearer and less problematic with physical reality than with other levels. Nevertheless, consonance and harmony can be well illustrated at this level and, at times, do become distinctly problematic.

Trying to move a physical object by sheer mental concentration is not a particularly efficacious means to any end. Consequently, it is not likely that the construction of such a means by an individual will survive environmental selection pressures. Similarly, walking may be a perfectly competent means in its own right, but may not be particularly efficacious for the end of getting from New York to L.A. or to Tokyo. Thus, that means-ends relationship will likewise tend not to survive. Note that such issues of consonance tend to become problematic only when the physical environment poses new or particularly difficult problems for us, e.g., a drastic reduction in game for a hunting culture. Even in these cases, the problem is clear even if the solution may not be.

Issues of disharmony with the physical environment share these characteristics of being occasionally imposed on us by the environment but, in general, of being problematic only in their solution, not in their recognition. Thus, if building a tool shed obstructs the view from the living room, we will tend to be aware of such a disharmony of ends. The decision about what to do about it may not be easy, but the recognition that a choice or a change needs to be made is.

Disharmonies tend to become problematic in terms of recognition only when the obstructions among ends are mediated very indirectly or obscurely in the environment. Thus, if the fact or nature of such a disharmony is not clear, the individual may know, or at least sense, that something isn't right—things just aren't working the way they

should—but has no particular idea why. Such obscure disharmonies are unusual between the individual and the physical world. An example of such an obscure disharmony at the level of a civilization might be a disharmony between some activity of the civilization and the ecological framework upon which it depends. An irrigation-based civilization that slowly destroys its own agricultural foundation because its irrigation practices do not prevent the build-up of salt in the soil may ‘know’ that something is wrong (may compare today with the old records of crop productivity), but have no idea what it is or what to do about it. Similarly, a civilization might destroy the ozone balance or the heat balance upon which it depends with its own products without recognizing what is happening until it has already happened.

Social Reality

Issues of consonance at the level of social reality are essentially issues of social skills and competence. The individual must develop efficacious interpersonal means and means-ends connections in order to function in his social environment. Thus, for example, each adequately functioning individual will have acquired the means of linguistic communication and of the presentation of the self, and will use these means toward, among many others, the ends of day-to-day transactions and the achievement of intimacy, respectively. (Language, of course, is also a means involved in the presentation of self.)

Issues of harmony with respect to social reality are likewise similar to the case of physical reality, with one important exception: it is much easier for social level disharmonies to remain obscure—they tend to be more indirect, more complex, and correspondingly less apparent than at the physical level. For example, the individual who succeeds in getting his way with people at the cost of achieving any intimacy with them may simply not recognize the connection. Such a difficulty in recognizing social level disharmonies, of course, means that they will tend to be more common and more troublesome than physical level disharmonies.

So much so, in fact, that Adler's primary focus in discussing the errors and difficulties that people tend to encounter was strongly on social reality. Adler well recognized that human beings had an “innate potentiality” to develop skills and competencies at the social level, and that the striving for superiority would inevitably lead to

the construction of such competencies. He also recognized the possibility that those social competencies might be of a minimal degree.

Adler's term for consonant and harmonious social competencies was social interest.

Social interest is not inborn, but it is an innate potentiality which has to be consciously developed. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 134)

The term social interest denotes the innate aptitude through which the individual becomes responsive to reality, which is primarily the social situation. Social interest is not a second dynamic force counterbalancing a striving for superiority. Like other psychological processes or traits, it is a part of the individual's equipment, although the most important part. It is used by him in his striving for superiority or perfection, which in itself is socially neutral. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 133, editors' comment)

All the problems of human life demand capacity for cooperation and preparation for it—the visible sign of social feeling. (Adler, 1964, p. 284)

Adler did not explicitly make the distinction between consonance and harmony, but it is implicit in his discussions and examples. Many, if not most, of his examples are of consonance—or its lack—for all too often we are concerned with trying to help people who have narrowly restricted and marginally effectual social skills. The impression is sometimes derived from such discussions of Adler's, however, that an individual with a developed social interest is one who is highly socially skilled and highly socially engaged. The development of social interest, thus, may come to be seen as the development of a socially engaged, nondetached life style.

The error of such a view is precisely in the fact that Adler's most fundamental sense of social interest was based on what we are calling social harmony, not on social consonance. Social interest is a harmony of thoughts, actions, and feelings with the level of social reality. Such a harmony is possible with rather little social engagement, and, in principle, even with little social consonance or skill.

The exceptions [to social interest as a lack of detachment] are cases where an individual forgoes the solution of certain aspects of life for the purpose of making a greater contribution to the advancement of society, as the artist and genius do. A philosopher must from time to time exile himself from society to think and write his books. But the mistake involved will never be great if a high degree of social interest is bound up with the goal of superiority. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 141)

Existential Reality

Issues of consonance and harmony occur with respect to the existential level of reality as well as with respect to the more material levels. That is, the ways in which we invest our lives and experiencing with meaning are as subject to considerations of efficacy and compatibility as are any other of our modes of engaging the world.

Disharmonies—and even difficulties of consonance—are much more likely to be obscure at the existential level than at any other. They are especially difficult to recognize and understand both because of the inherent complexity of the level and because the selection pressures against inadequate existential orientations are subtle and not necessarily apparent. Failures at this level, however, can ultimately be devastating.

Furthermore, existential orientations, and thus existential dissonances and disharmonies, visit themselves upon the individual's social and even physical orientations. This is an immediate consequence of the fact that an individual's orientations in any given level serve as the epistemological framework within which the lower levels are approached and conceived: the existential world view and goals conceptually frame the social world view and goals which, in turn, conceptually frame the physical world view and goals. Conversely, physical level projects in life serve as the ground and context for social level projects which, in turn, serve as the ground and context for existential projects. Thus, the orientations, consonances, and harmonies with respect to the three levels are not independent. The three levels of reality differentiate *aspects* of the overall world view and goal structure, as much as components.

Adler was among the first psychologists to recognize the existence and importance of existential issues to an understanding of personality (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, pp. 7-9, editors' introduction). His concerns for such issues range from Adler's emphasis on the basic subjectivity of existence to a focus on the problem of the meaningfulness of life. Adler, however, felt that "all tasks put to the individual are social problems" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1973, p. 52). Thus, Adler subsumed the existential within the social, and did not develop any conceptualizations or theory specific to the existential level (Bickhard & Ford, 1976). Nevertheless, the basic compatibility of Adlerian psychology with existential assumptions and concerns makes it a rich ground for the exploration and development of existential psychology.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN ADLERIAN THEORY

The Constitution of Psychopathology

Psychopathology in Adlerian psychology is constituted as a lack of social interest (Bickhard, 1978; Bickhard & Ford, 1976). Recognizing that, for Adler, the social subsumed the existential, we find, therefore, that psychopathology is constituted by disharmonies of the individual's modes of coping with the social and existential levels of reality.

A disharmony, however, is a (dys)functional relationship between the individual's basic foundations for acting and the world in which he acts. It can reasonably be asked what it is in those foundations that yields such a dysfunctional relationship. That is, it is reasonable to ask what the basic source is for such dysfunctionality.

A dysfunctionality of the foundations for interaction must be a dysfunctionality in terms of the goal-directed systems of which those foundations are comprised. Thus, the proximate ground of psychopathology will be the organization of those systems. But the goals are constructed by the individual in the context of prior goals and assumptions. Ultimately, the goal hierarchy is founded on the basic assumptions of the world view. Correspondingly, the ultimate ground of psychopathology must be in those basic assumptions.

The question remains, however, of what it is about such basic assumptions that could ground psychopathology. It might seem that a simple incompleteness of those assumptions could yield dissonances and disharmonies: insufficient understanding yields inappropriate methods of coping. This, in fact, is true. But such incomplete information with consequent dysfunctionality does not yield psychopathology in any full sense: we are all dysfunctional from ignorance every time we encounter a new situation. Psychopathology is more than just ignorance, though it may certainly involve it.

An incompleteness of an individual's basic assumptions, thus, does not constitute psychopathology. Those basic assumptions of the pathological individual's world view must in some sense be in error, they must be mistaken. Such a mistaken world view will ground an interactive goal hierarchy that manifests dissonances and disharmonies that cannot be eliminated by the simple alleviation of ignorance. "The cure [of a neurosis] is brought about by a correction of the faulty picture of the world and the unequivocal acceptance of a mature picture of the world" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p.

333). The grounds of a neurosis must be changed, not simply enriched: those grounds are mistaken, not simply incomplete. Thus, the grounds of psychopathology are basic assumptions that are in fact basic mistakes.

The Origin of Psychopathology

Psychopathological mistakes in the world view are constructed by the individual's creativity in concert with environmental selection pressures, just like all other aspects and components of the foundations for interaction. Similarly, basic mistakes are constructed within the striving for superiority. Thus, basic mistakes are products of the same creative striving for adaptation as all nonmistaken personalities and aspects of personalities. This leads directly to the basic question of why some of those creative acts yield psychopathological mistakes and others do not.

This question, of course, has no ultimate causal answer within Adlerian theory—the creative act is precisely creative and not fully determined by antecedents. The development of personality, therefore, is a product of creative variations and environmental selections. Some of those creative variations can be expected to be mistaken and, if they survive environmental selection, they might ground the development of a psychopathological personality.

The question, however, can be understood in such a way that it does not seek a causal answer: is there a basic difference between those creative acts that tend to yield basic mistakes and those that do not? In this form, the question has an answer.

Both the question in this form and its answer are related to another natural question that can be asked about basic mistakes: what is it about some mistaken assumptions in the world view that they ground a pathological orientation to the world while others do not? The point of this question is simply that, as with incomplete knowledge, mistaken assumptions are common and inevitable in everyone's life. Mistaken assumptions per se neither constitute nor ground psychopathology. What else, then, does an assumption have to be, in addition to being mistaken, in order to be a basic mistake?

Basic mistake-creating acts and basic mistakes themselves have in common that they are a turning away from the world and its problems. The individual who feels overwhelmed by the problems of life and who adopts an assumption that protects him from such a sense of powerlessness by protecting him from full participation in life is

the individual who is constructing a basic mistake. Such self-protective basic mistakes can be extremely subtle. They do not have to involve any explicit conceptualization of the self as weak or incompetent, though basic mistakes which serve to excuse the individual from full participation would certainly seem to. Others, however, can represent the individual trying to understand life, trying to understand what works. They take the form of implicit bargaining with life about what the rules of the game are, what approaches to life will assure success, and what *constitutes* success in life. Even the self-excusing mistake guarantees the individual success in respect to whatever his excuse is: as long as that excuse is true (or maintained), he is 'assured' of being a basically worthwhile human being in spite of his lack of other forms of success.

All such basic mistakes have the form of a reliance on some rule or principle external to the individual as an assurance of successful, meaningful living. They all constitute attempts to find an external source of power in coping with the problems of life (Becker, 1973). They all deflect and hinder the individual from reliance on his only ultimate source of power: the full creative engagement of the striving for superiority with whatever life has to offer. They are all products of, constitutive of, and perpetuators of a lack of fundamental courage in fully confronting the experience of living. Psychopathology, ultimately, originates in, and is constituted by, an implicit lack of courage in living.

The Perpetuation of Psychopathology

It is not difficult to understand that a mistaken turning away from life would ground marginally efficacious further developments of world view and goals. The reliance on an external power or assurance that is implicit in a basic mistake will distort both the construction of later foundations for living and the corrections that might be made to those foundations from later experiences. Dissonances and disharmonies will be a natural result.

Thus, basic mistakes will tend to both create and maintain the consequent dissonances and disharmonies of psychopathology. But the question arises as to what maintains the basic mistakes. Why aren't they corrected through experience like other mistaken assumptions? Why are basic mistakes any more resistant to change than any other aspect of the world view?

The issue here is the rigidity inherent in psychopathology. Psychopathology is not only a disharmonious constraint in living; it is also a highly persistent constraint. In the face of the painful and sometimes devastating consequences of social and existential disharmonies, and in the midst of the best efforts that highly motivated, intelligent, and creative people can put forward, underlying basic mistakes and consequent goals and basic styles of life can manifest remarkable continuity. Furthermore, it is not simply a matter of the individual not chancing upon the solution because of the complexity and obscurity of the problem. If that were so, then a purely educative approach would suffice to replace basic mistakes and mistaken goals and, thus, to effect a cure of psychopathology. Clearly, that is not all there is to psychotherapy. Education with regard to unavailable skills and understanding can play an important role in therapy, but the phenomenon of an implicit resistance to change—a seeming inability to grasp freeing perspectives—remains to be overcome in therapy by other means. It also remains to be explained.

The core of the explanation lies in the thought that, insofar as a basic mistake turns the individual away from a full engagement with living, so might it ipso facto turn the individual away from precisely those approaches to living that might uncover and change the basic mistake. Basic mistakes, then, are self-protective. They jealously demand full reliance on them before they provide the assurance of success and meaningfulness.

Just how basic mistakes provide such self-protection, however, is not yet clear. Adler himself did not explicitly address this neurotic paradox of rigidity in the face of dysfunctionality. It remains as one of the problems to be pursued in the further development of Adlerian theory; it remains as one of the problems to be addressed within the framework of an Adlerian metapsychology.

SUMMARY

The perspective within which this article has developed has been that of a subjective version of the biological adaptational nature of human beings. Within this metapsychological perspective, the major themes of Adlerian theory have been explicated and organized. This process has also involved occasional revisions and extensions of Adler's theory as well as the clarification of some directions for still further development. Such is the purpose of a metapsychology.

No claim is made that this subjective adaptational metapsychology is the only one possible for viewing Adlerian theory. Adler's writings are rich and complex and might well support and reward approaches from alternative metapsychological perspectives. Nevertheless, subjective adaptationalism seems to have many natural affinities to Adlerian theory and corresponding strengths in its application as a metapsychology. Its natural differentiation of processes, foundations, and environments for human activity reveals a similar natural differentiation in Adler's concepts. Basic Adlerian concepts such as creativity, goals, and social interest derive readily from subjective adaptationalism. Even more fundamentally, subjective adaptationalism can be viewed as simply a term for the basic conceptual framework that must be assumed before the basic concept of the striving for superiority can be defined: once defined, the rest of Adlerian theory follows from that definition considered in that framework.

In any case, whether subjective adaptationalism or some other, Adlerian theory is overdue for an articulation of an appropriate metatheory. The richness and power of Adler's thought will not have its full impact on psychology until it is embedded in a metapsychology that can both support its own internal evolution and embed it in a broader science of human beings.

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