

Freud vs. Adler

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Alfred Adler was one of Freud's first disciples. He even held important positions in the psychoanalytical activity initiated by Freud and his supporters. But it is the same person who was the first great dissident from Freudian psychoanalysis, whose purely sexual sense he criticizes, inclining towards the will to power seen as a main source of neuroses.

Adler is undoubtedly one of the most important dissidents to psychoanalysis. In addition, just as Jung, Adler also created his own psychoanalytical school which, in order to distinguish it from Freud's, he called *individual psychology*.

Since the very time of their work together as colleagues, Freud would express his disagreement with Adler. He didn't make it publicly yet but - wishing to spare the emerging psychoanalytical movement - restricted himself to epistolary remarks, such as those addressed to Jung.

Long time after his official separation from Adler and his group, Freud gave up restraint and started passing ironical remarks on his former adept in a manner that, we have

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to admit it, was downright irresistible. In the chapter written on clarifications and explanations of all sorts from “New Introductory Lesson to Psycho-Analysis”, 1933), Freud used to draw a parallel between the odd career of a country doctor, who diagnosed every health problem in the same way and Adler’s practice. “For, whether a man is a homosexual or a necrophilic - Freud wrote - a hysteric suffering from anxiety, an obsessional neurotic cut off from society, or a raving lunatic, the «Individual Psychologist» of the Adlerian school will declare that the impelling motive of his condition is that he wishes to assert himself, to overcompensate for his inferiority, to remain «on top», to pass from the feminine to the masculine line.”

In reality, this perspective is not to be wholly rejected. Nevertheless, it covers a concept that Freudian psychoanalysis created too - the secondary benefit of the disease. “The self-preservative instinct will try to profit by every situation; the ego will seek to turn even illness to its advantage. In psycho-analysis this is known as the «secondary gain from illness». Though, indeed, when we think of the facts of masochism, of the unconscious need for punishment and of neurotic self-injury, which make plausible the hypothesis of there being instinctual impulses that run contrary to self-preservation, we even feel shaken in our belief in the general validity of the commonplace truth on which the theoretical structure of Individual Psychology is erected.”

Confronted with the obvious fact that Adlerian psychology has been successful in many instances, Freud made a remark that he would permanently turn to in Jung’s case:

“But a theory such as this is bound to be very welcome to the great mass of the people, a theory which recognizes

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no complications, which introduces no new concepts that are hard to grasp, which knows nothing of the unconscious, which gets rid at a single blow of the universally oppressive problem of sexuality and which restricts itself to the discovery of the artifices by which people seek to make life easy. For the mass of the people themselves take things easily: they call for no more than a single reason by way of explanation, they do not thank science for its diffuseness, they want to have simple solutions and to know that problems are solved.”

Fritz Wittels (“Sigmund Freud”, 1923) shows more generosity to Adler, also acknowledging his merits; we shouldn’t lie to ourselves, though: “Adler is one of Freud’s most outstanding students”, but only for one shortcoming: “he could not analyze. He had no easy access to facts of unconscious life. His interpretations of dreams could be often corrected by people outside the field and, in dealing with his patients, he would rarely go down to areas Freud and his students usually reached”.

Adler’s theory came from Nietzsche and was called “the will to power”. “What does man want? What does every being want? To be powerful. Therefore, what exactly affects us most? Weakness, inferiority. Pushed by its own thirst for power, the lower being passionately strives to improve, as it cannot bear the feeling of inferiority. Thus, in a huge psychic effort, stammering Demostene became an orator; a shortsighted person turns into a painter and a paralyzed one into Stilicon or a Torstensson. If the strife is successful, inferiority is compensated for and overcome by psychic over-elevation. Inferiority turns into added value. The two

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generals mentioned above were known and feared for the lightning action speed of their armies”.

But what happens if the effort towards inferiority compensation does not prove successful? “Under such circumstances, individuals take refuge in their disease, just like a monk would when tired with the world. By such retreat into disease, the neurotic person troubles and plays the tyrant over his environment, forcing the latter to provide care, compassion and also to large expenses, that is to say to bestow on the troubled person an importance he would never have held if healthy”.

Consistent with his theory, in his therapeutic approach, Adler never bothers then to turn unconscious representations into conscious ones, giving up *free associations* and dream interpretations. “He knows neuroses have all just one purpose: to falsely raise the ill person in the eyes of those around”. Adler thinks that any analysis is a struggle between doctor and patient, the latter “refusing to describe his symptoms and their origin for fear that would place him in an inferior position to their doctor’s”.

An even more curious fact is that Adler quite often had the opportunity to treat people under former psychoanalytical therapy for years. They knew everything about the oedipal complex and everything psychoanalysis asserts. “But they have absolutely no idea about the fact that they cannot stand their inferiority complex and that they have taken refuge in their disease instead of struggling to overcome their own inferiority in one way or another”.

Freud had made efforts to show that inferior beings are not always neurotic and that, after all, *the castration com-*

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plex (the anxiety derived thereof) lies at the root of the feeling of inferiority. An experienced psychoanalyst has nevertheless met such facts as Adler described quite often. And our dreams, be it we were neurotic or not, are dominated by compensating elements. Our life, our professional direction even is unconsciously controlled by the tendency to dominate over organic or psychic inferiority. The above example about the stammering person turned into an orator can be endlessly multiplied.

Jung shows no more understanding to Adler's theories although, apparently at least, he has borrowed the idea of psychic compensation. For Jung, for example, dreams are an attempt at compensating a unilateral attitude of the dreamer's conscience. Jung thinks Adler's "will to power" must itself be viewed as a tendency to balance (compensate for) Freud's sexual theories. In such a way as if Freud and Adler represented the two poles of the unity encompassing sexuality and power to the same extent.

The interesting thing is that Freud seems nevertheless to have assimilated Adler's "lesson", the latter's insistence to impose the "will to power", as this is what he notes in his "Civilization and its Discontents" (1930):

"...Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him,

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to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.”

Isn't there a hint to power hidden here under the dissimulating image of aggressiveness? The presence of the famous wish for power, for domination, etc., would be difficult to deny, even on lower levels of life and mostly on disadvantaged ones.

It is no less true, nevertheless, that this long talked about “will to power” may also get other connotations were we to catch, isolate and analyze it not only theoretically but, mainly, clinically. Such research, open and free from any particular school prejudice, can certainly reveal surprising things in that direction.

Bibliography:

Sigmund Freud: “Civilization and its Discontents”, 1930.

Sigmund Freud: “New Introductory Lessons to Psycho-Analysis, 1933.

Fritz Wittels: “Sigmund Freud”, 1923.

C.G. Jung: “Memories, Dreams, Reflections”.

Amazon links (you can purchase some of the books quoted in this paper by clicking **Amazon links**):

[Civilization and its Discontents](#) by Sigmund Freud.

[New Introductory Lectures to Psycho-Analysis](#) by Sigmund Freud.

[Memories, Dreams, Reflections](#) by C.G. Jung.

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