

## Frankl, Adler, and Spirituality

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This paper is centered upon the theoretical differences between Alfred Adler and his former colleague Viktor Frankl from the point of view of a psychologist whose clinical beliefs have been influenced by both leaders. Such a confrontation cannot be honestly avoided by one with an Adlerian orientation, for Frankl treats Adlerian psychology with a paradoxical praise and disdain. He has credited Adler with pioneering existential psychiatry and the importance of social factors. Yet he regards his own contributions to psychiatry as sufficient to warrant a "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy."

There is little doubt that Frankl has, by his personal actions, re-emphasized in our times the necessity of a psychology of courage and spirituality. It is likewise important to emphasize that Frankl's existential analysis can flourish only by misinterpreting the meaning and intent of Adlerian efforts.

Personally, I have little doubt "that Viktor E. Frankl is one of the

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kindest and bravest men who ever was a pupil of Alfred Adler."<sup>1</sup> Beyond this character assessment there is considerable danger for the individual (or Adlerian) psychologist that students and clergy will take seriously Frankl's contention that Adlerian psychology is "not nullified by logotherapy but rather overarched by it."<sup>2</sup> Yet there is the possibility that by restricting his theory to a joyless resignation to a feudal social system, Frankl has introduced a destructive irrelevancy into his system. Even so, Adlerians had best develop self-esteem and social interest sufficient to give feedback to Frankl, rather than a mere irresponsible elation over being "good enough" to be mentioned by him.

It may be sufficient to generate an enlivening and friendly disputation by stating that Frankl has been unfair to the Adlerian movement by his misinterpretation of: a) the chief motive of the Adlerian approach as a simple "will to power," b) social interest as devoid of socio-temporal connotations, c) spirituality as different from social interest, d) logotherapy (and humor) as something new and novel in psychotherapy. His system seems further limited by a professional fixation and a fascination with concepts that lack definition and operational identification. For example, "once the existential vacuum has eventuated into noögenic neurosis, it goes without saying that its treatment is reserved to the medical profession."<sup>3</sup> Time is running out for the Divine-Right (or "goes-without-saying") policy in the 1970's.

A very limited summary of these points follows:

1. *Will to power.* "Adler organized his own idea in terms of an extended conception of *power*. The emphasis on power does not mean an emphasis upon aggression; rather it relates to fulfillment of one's individuality and one's milieu."<sup>4</sup> How and why Frankl could ever have interpreted Adler's "power" as crass force, apart from "meaning" or the ideal of expanded self-esteem and social interest, is a mystery. Someone with more knowledge of the times and persons should answer this.

2. *Social interest.* "Social interest to the Adlerian is not synonymous with social conformity but connotes a feeling of intimate belonging to the full spectrum of mankind, past, present, and future."<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Frankl, quite paradoxically since he seems to be of mystical bent, has taken all the mystery out of *gemeinschaftsgefühl* by an overly literal interpretation. Even worse, he ascribes a "there-and-then" environmental stance to the tenets of individual psychology. So in Frankl's thinking, an Adlerian psychotherapist will always be victimized by the patients' subtle ploys. In his mind, Adlerian theory is for the adolescent. The therapist of that persuasion generates excessive guilt for parents and directs patients toward status needs that are self-defeating.<sup>6</sup> Frankl without doubt experienced the worst behavior of man to man. Yet he benefited and benefited the world through his response to the objectively miserable conditions. It is true that this priceless empathic process is not an automatic, mechanistic one. One cannot demand to survive and become influential. But an abysmal waste of human potentialities does not invalidate the principle of growth through commitment to humanity.

3. *Spirituality*. In spite of the fact that Frankl claims no theological meaning for his "spirituality," clergy are drawn to existential analysis by the term. Frankl's spirituality seems to be Adler's social interest in disguise. "... the spiritual is 'with' (Bei-sein) other objects and persons in the world."<sup>7</sup> It is a striving for completion, through enhancing social interest, germane to later Adlerian thought. Frankl's spirituality leads, in his thoughts, to self-transcendence and responsibility. But in a more respectable scientific system of processes and forces (rather than entities), one fulfills one's self, probably only in temporary peak experiences, by maximizing self-esteem and social interest. But we do not leave the self or the milieu no matter how hard we try. Even creativity has its limits.

4. *Psychotherapy*. Logotherapy offers no advances beyond traditional Adlerian psychotherapy. Its new descriptive vocabulary fails where it is most needed: to focus upon the variables involved in the process of identification. What are the influences of life styles—and their hidden goals—upon each other that lead to change of attitude and behavior? Frankl is not drawn to such questions because he does not view life as

a creative process in which man is responsible for his auto-evolution (e.g., Adler, Teilhard de Chardin). Living, to Frankl, is finding the "true" meaning already "out there." Hitler's conscience, for example, is "there," but suppressed. Life seems much simpler in such a system, but where is the person and his development? Logotherapy attempts to have the patient re-enact, to the point of caricature, what he fears most. Then one encourages the patient to focus his energy outward to his social milieu and toward the future. When he states "It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking toward the future—*sub specie aeternitatis*,"<sup>8</sup> Frankl is giving a definition of *gemeinschaftsgefühl* or social interest, under his rubric of "spirituality" or "noetic."

It may be that the practice of overstating and understating a patient's views, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and equality, is the hallmark of the outstanding therapist. The same exaggeration is a necessary technique of wit and humor. Frankl should be given credit for his emphasis upon the maturity of humor. But again there is the inherent belief that one simply puts on humor as he does a new pair of gloves. It just isn't that simple: true humor grows from a well-developed self-esteem and social interest.<sup>9</sup> It does not grow until the patient stops searching for and receiving esteem through subtle self-punishment, distancing from others, and harboring the hyperambition of one who lacks courage to make mistakes. Here again Frankl lacks the perspective of patients' learning and therapists' modeling and reinforcement.

Over 20 years ago, Birnbaum<sup>10</sup> showed a difference between Frankl and Adler in their responses to the questions of patients. The former responded to existential-psychological questions with existential-philosophical answers, while Adler remained psychological throughout. For example, to the query "Why should I love my neighbor?" Adler would, I am told, respond "I cannot answer that question, but I can tell you why you ask it." Frankl, on the other hand, would give philosophical (or psychological) reasons as why, in general, all men should love. One therefore can see Frankl as being the orthodox tutor: he who lectures to one person. In contrast, Adler wanted the person to

discover the demands, goals, rationalizations, and frustrations of his unique life style in interaction with others. Compare Frankl's exhortations to patients to behave differently in paradoxical intention<sup>11</sup> with Adler's indirect treatment method.<sup>12</sup> Adler's contribution was to expose the patient to situations that highlighted for him the way he ordinarily avoided contributing to mutual solutions of problems. With Adler, the patient would be given only simple "hackneyed" advice but could infer the enervating effect of his life style by subtle refusal to follow socially harmonious suggestions. In short, the authentic individual psychologist would be much more impressed than would the existential analysts with the patients' creative life style. The Adlerian would admire the patient's ability to learn and relearn in an environment that, rather than reward actions of low social interest, would stimulate learning from immediate actions. In short, there seems to be no "overarching" of Adler by Frankl as yet—or in the near future.

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