

Striving for Quality, Change and Perfection

Dr. Manuel Angel (Coco) Morales

The work of Alfred Adler represents a major breakthrough from the classical psychoanalysis. For this great scholar, human beings are not bad by nature; whatever their faults have been are due to an erroneous conception of life, and they must not be oppressed by them. He strongly argued that people can change, that the past was dead, and that they were free to be happy. Adler (Individual Psychology, 1930) fashioned an understanding of human nature that did not depict human beings as victimized by instincts, conflicts, biological forces and childhood experiences.

Adler called his new approach individual psychology because he focused on the uniqueness of each person, denying the universality of biological motives and goals ascribed to us by Sigmund Freud. For him, each person was primarily a social being, shaped by his individual and social environments and interactions, not by biological needs and continuous efforts to satisfy them. Sex was minimized as a determining factor for human behavior. The conscious rather than the unconscious was the core of his human psychology framework. His voice was clear. Rather than being determined by forces we cannot see and control, we actively direct and create our growth and our own future.

The fundamental fact of life was that of striving for superiority, that is, for quality, constructive change and perfection. By striving for perfection, he did not mean that each of us strives to be above everyone else in a position or prestige, nor that phrase in his usage, referred to an arrogant, domineering tendency. The main argument was that people strive for quality (doing the right thing), change (transforming reality) and perfection (best execution) by showing an upward improvement, an increase, a movement from below to above, or the impetus from minus to plus.

The great upward drive parallels physical growth and is a necessary part of life. Everything we do follow the impetus and direction of this striving, which is constantly in operation. Everything is marked by the striving for quality, change and perfection. Drawing upon Darwin and the notion of evolution, Adler said that all life expresses itself as constant movement toward the goal of preservation and improvement of the

individual and the species. The goal is attained by adapting with intelligence, mastering the environment and changing for growth and development. The necessity for better and more complete adaptation always exists. It cannot end; the striving for quality and perfection is innate. It must be innate or embedded, or no form of life could survive and progress.

A vital statement was that the ultimate and overall goal (the great upward drive) is oriented toward the future. Whereas Freud saw human behavior as rigidly determined by physiological forces (the instincts) and experiences of childhood, Adler saw our motivation in terms of expectations for the future. He stated that we cannot appeal to instincts or impulses as explanatory principles of human behavior. Only the final goal of perfection can explain our motivation for growth and development.

All psychological processes can be explained by Adler's concept of FINALISM which is the idea that we have an ultimate goal, a final state of being, and an ever-present tendency or a necessity to move in that direction. There is an important aspect to this notion of finalism. The goals for which we, as individuals, reach do not exist as actualities, but rather as potentialities. We strive for ideals that exist in us subjectively.

The fundamental Adlerian proposition is that **STRONG IDEAS GUIDE HUMAN BEHAVIOR.**

To this individual psychology, I can add that the best, perfect or divine ideal is that of God, which relates very well to what Adler described as a concrete and real formulation (and experience) of the goal of perfection.

The dynamics of striving for perfection work to increase rather than lessen tension. Our sole motivation is not the reduction of tension or the maintenance of a neutral or tension-free-state. The striving for quality, constructive change and perfection, with its correlate notions of upward, forward, more, progress, prosperity and increase, call for great expenditures of energy, effort and hard work. Human beings want quite the opposite of stability and quietness. All societies have a theory of quality.

Human beings, as social entities, strive for perfection not only as individuals but also as members of organizations and of a society. We strive for the perfection of our culture. Individuals, organizations and society are closely interrelated and interdependent, so people must function constructively with others for the good of all.

The social and organizational design question is the following: How in our daily lives, do we go about trying to attain the goals of quality, change and perfection?

Adler answers this question with his concept of life style.

Mankind has the only ultimate goal of quality and there are many great specifics by which individuals strive for that goal. We express our striving for quality in several different ways. Each of us develops a unique pattern of characteristics, behaviors and habits of the mind and of the heart by which we reach the goal. To understand how style of life develops, Adler stresses the concepts of inferiority feelings and compensations, for they form the basis of life style. As infants are affected with inferiority feelings, they are motivated to compensate in some way.

Everything we do is shaped and defined by our unique life style; it determines which aspects of our total environment we listen to or ignore and what attributes we will hold. Listen carefully to words of someone, observe his/her behavior and come to an interpretation of his/her style...

The notion of life style is not deterministic and is later clarified with the concept of creative self. The crucial understanding is that the life style is created by the individual who makes the decision to work hard for improving the self. Quality people create their selves rather than passively re-cycling previous behaviors, engaging in destructiveness, or passively waiting for things to come. A person relates himself/herself always according to his/she own interpretation of him/her... The interpretation he/she makes of life and of reality provides the basis for the creative, healthy and intelligent construction of his/her attitudes and behaviors toward life.

Life style as it progresses toward the future forms the essence of human character, which defines human attitudes and behavior toward outside problems:

1. Problems involving behavior toward others.
2. Problems of occupation.
3. Problems of love.

He posited the existence of four basic life styles adopted by people for dealing with these problems.

1. The Dominant, Ruling or Distortion Style- shows little, if any, social awareness or interest. A person eliciting this style is likely to behave without regards for others.
2. The Getting Style – expects to get everything from other people and so becomes dependent on them, and this is the most common style.
3. The Avoiding Style - makes no attempt to face or struggle with life's problems in a workable way.
4. The Socially Useful Style – is able to cooperate with others and to act in accordance with their needs.

The first three styles are typical of people who are not prepared to cope in a healthy manner with everyday problems of life. The fourth style is common of a person with a profound sense of civic virtue and social responsibility.

Getting along and coming to terms with others is the main task we encounter in life, especially for those of us who are in the helping professions.

Dr. Manuel Angel (Coco) Morales

Contact freelance at: cocomorales1@gmail.com

Cell phone: (787) 249-6102