

An Alternative to Autocracy

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I suggest that we consider the potential impact of a national Adlerian movement concerning "Crisis of Authority" in our institutions and especially in our schools. Our National Goals Research Staff recognize the complexity and rapid change in our society, and they emphasize environmental and population problems and seem to overlook changes in human relationships as a primary problem. They give us only two procedures for coping with the new mood in our schools: (a) problem solving and individuation or (b) traditional knowledge transmission. I propose an alternative: equality. I agree that "the educational system is the crucial single institution for the development of our citizenry" (National Goals Research Staff, 1970), but I disagree that the underlying problem in education is one of growth—it is one of values, and this problem is reflected in changes in human relationships. In the relatively stable autocratic society of the past, people were unequal with a monarch at the top of the social structure who, with his "divine right," was seen as near to God, the ultimate authority. In families there was a similar, ultimate authority, the FATHER, who was lord and master, dictating to his wife and children.

Challenge to Authority

Our forefathers in launching a democratic society would never have dreamed what far-reaching implications democratic principles might have if applied to all human relationships. For example, the classroom was, and still is all too often, a small autocratic society with the teacher in a position of authority, the taskmaster, who not only can dictate goals and processes to the class but is also supposed to have the corner on knowledge. This authoritarian relationship was probably functional 200 years ago, but today our children are often better informed than their teacher, not only in the area of facts but in the area of human rights. So authority is challenged again. And, in my opinion, every authority will be and should be challenged if such authority is imposed on individuals or groups without involvement, participation, and consensus. The ideal in a new equilateral relationship would include full participation in decision making processes with a goal of reasoned and shared authority rather than imposed authority forced upon humans in inferior positions by superiors who happen to wield power over them.

In reality, many parents and teachers are not pleased with their assumed role of superior authority but, having taken on the trappings of a competitive culture, do not know how to remove themselves from the royal throne. If they sincerely want to change the relationship, abdication seems the only route—but all too often the abdication is only that, and is not abdication to some other position—namely to a position of human among humans, of equal among equals.

Violence as Alternative

In 1970, one hundred years after the birth of Alfred Adler, throughout the world violence is still seen and used as a major approach to solution of human problems. I am not speaking only of war, crime, riots, and revolutions. I am speaking also of the many more subtle forms of violence which are perpetrated every day in our civilized institutions: in our homes, in our families, in our classrooms, in our hospitals, in our cities, on our highways—wherever humans meet, in pairs or in groups.

In our search for peace, we cannot overlook what Dr. Montessori has taught us about our violence—the systematic dehumanization that we perpetrate on small children in our society. We cannot overlook the recent writings which indict our entire educational system, pointing out specifically how we fail to educate children but also how we subject them to an oppressive, grim, and joyless experience not too much different from imprisonment (Silberman, 1970). The need for change is evident. The principles underlying the new system must include social equality, human dignity, a relationship of mutual respect, of cooperation, community, and connectedness.

Equality as Alternative

Alfred Adler devoted his life to the task of bringing people together. His principles for understanding human behavior and for teaching people to live together as equals appear deceptively simple (Adler 1956). Those who have taken these principles seriously and attempted to apply them in the family, or in the classroom, or in the community are well aware of the pitfalls. Accepting the Golden Rule as a valid principle is easy for all of us, but in our competitive western society, humans have so little experience in cooperation, that bringing about significant social change will require totally new departures.

Alfred Adler was convinced that psychological knowledge and principles were not treasures to be jealously guarded by a few high priests but should be made available to all people. He saw our schools as the natural medium for change and before the Nazi takeover in Austria, had established over thirty child guidance clinics in the public schools of Vienna. Today we call these activities Family Education Centers. They provide a forum where parents, children, teachers, and other members of the community can come together to help one another, to learn new principles, to learn problem-solving techniques.

The ideas that Alfred Adler (1970) described in his book *The Education of Children* are as valid today as they were forty years ago, but as Rudolf Dreikurs points out, still hardly known by parents, teachers, educators. Adler taught us to understand the meaning of behavior by looking at the goal of behavior. He provided the first criteria for normalcy or mental health at a time when most psychologists were still hung up on pathology. Adler's concept of social interest and how to provide for the development of social interest is crucial if we are to survive as a people. Adler's unflinching optimism, described by some as hysterical, is absolutely essential today when there are so many reasons to be pessimistic

children have proved valuable for all of human relationships—in the family, in the school, in the community, in industry, in politics, and in relationships between nations. Social interest is recognized today as the basis for normalcy. Therefore, the development of deeper and stronger social interest is not only the goal of education, guidance, and therapy, but an indispensable prerequisite for man's ability to live in peace with his fellow man. Adlerian psychologists recognize and emphasize the important role of the mother in introducing children to society and in developing social interest. They also feel that the school must play a critical role in correcting errors made in family upbringing, and finally, the Adlerian psychologists consider indispensable the role of removal of economic oppression by class or nation.

Conclusion

I have chosen to discuss an alternative to violence. Here I must express opposition to popular theories which tell us that man is innately aggressive. Aggression, like prejudice, must be carefully taught. Children learn it from their parents, their playmates, their government, the mass media. Aggression emerges within the context of the culture. The capacity for aggression is innate but it must be carefully promoted to be seen in its full state. Nowhere is this concept more clearly developed than the courageous statement of Karl Menninger (1970) in his book *The Crime of Punishment*.

Adler (1956) considers social interest in much the same way, i.e., the capacity is innate, but it must be carefully promoted. "Social interest is not inborn, but it is an innate potentiality which has to be consciously developed" (Adler, 1938). As Ashley Montague said, "Man is indeed polypotential in his capacity to learn virtually anything, and he can learn to be aggressive as he can learn to be unaggressive" (Adler, 1938). In that knowledge lies the hope so well expressed by Adler (1938) in *Social Interest: A Challenge to Mankind*, that man, "by taking the proper measures, may yet save himself from his own self-generated aggressiveness."

What is the potential of an Adlerian movement in this country? What would happen if the principles organized by Rudolf Dreikurs and other students of Adler could be disseminated to families and schools throughout the country? Certainly not a Utopia—for life will always be characterized by problems and difficulties. But perhaps we could pass on to our children and grandchildren a much greater legacy—a world where a crisis in authority would be old-fashioned because humans had learned to create shared and reasoned authority through equalitarian processes in an atmosphere of human dignity and mutual respect—a society where violence would not be considered an alternative in the solution of human problems—a society where the meaning of life would be useful—where social feeling would come as naturally as breathing or walking—where human interaction would be based not on hostility, distrust, inferiority feelings and fear, but on social interest, confidence in others, a sense of equality and courage (Dreikurs, 1971).