

Address to the International Conference of the European Scientists' Union: Some Contributions of Adlerian Psychology to Society

Francis X. Walton

Introduction

by Roy M. Kern

There are few professionals who have been as successful in spreading the ideas of Individual Psychology in North America and Europe as Frank Walton. For decades he has demonstrated his clinical and educational skills in North America and Europe. This address by Dr. Frank Walton captures Frank's ability to lecture to a high-level professional group on the principles of Individual Psychology.

One might ask why Frank has been so successful through the years. Is it his personality, his professional skill set, or some combination of both? To answer such questions, one of the coeditors reflected on his many hours of observing Frank lecturing and demonstrating his skills in the Baltic States, where both were presenting to psychologists and teachers. The estimated time of observation was 70 hours over a three-year period. From this extensive exposure of observing Frank in action, I began to see why Frank is so successful.

First, he skillfully applies the principles of Individual Psychology in the therapy process. Second, he possesses personality attributes that help him build rapport immediately with other people. These attributes include a contagious sense of humor, warmth, and social interest. There are few who would not be able to feel the caring Frank has for others when he presents or demonstrates his interviews with individuals and families. We as

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coeditors of the journal observed another critical component to his success: Frank makes the theory very understandable, whether he is talking to professors, therapists, or laypeople. Finally, regardless of the audience, Frank rarely deviates from the theory he learned from Rudolph Dreikurs and other Adlerians. Though the coeditors would have liked more formal empirical research in the lecture, we also acknowledge it is this lack of emphasis that makes his presentation of Individual Psychology principles more accessible and allows more time for focusing on the basis of the theory.

As you read the following presentation Frank gave to the International Conference of European Scientists in Bulgaria, a group unfamiliar with Individual Psychology, pay attention to the way he presents the principles in such an effective manner. Frank's presentation is a clear picture of his use of the theory, and serves as one model for others to consider when presenting to lay professional groups.

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Members of the European Union of Scientists and guests: I am honored and very pleased to be with you here today. I am here with you as a consequence of the work I have been doing at Trakia University.

My invitation to work with students and faculty members at Trakia University came about as a result of my being a member of the faculty of the International Adlerian Summer Institute. This two-week institute is held in a different country each summer. In July 2010, it will be held in Romania near Brasov. The institute, known by its initials as "ICASSI," attracts participants from approximately 25 countries. The faculty is comprised of accomplished professionals from 10 to 15 countries; it was established by psychiatrist Rudolf Dreikurs in 1962. Dreikurs, a younger colleague of Adler, established the summer institute because of his dedication to spreading the teaching of Adlerian psychology to people around the world, not only as a psychological method of treatment, but as a philosophy of life (ICASSI, 2010).

Due to the participation of scientists from Trakia University in the activity of ICASSI in 2008 in Hungary and in the future summer session in Romania in 2010, the international university project titled "Model for Enhancing the Quality of Education at Trakia University" was realized.

Its success in education and research activity was achieved through the dedicated work of all participants and above all the support of the Rector of Trakia University, Prof. Ivan Stankov, and the president of the Board of Trustees, Prof. Ivan Bojkov. As a consequence of the success of the project Prof. Videv extended an invitation to me for honorary membership in the Union of Scientists in Stara Zagora. I very much appreciate receiving such an invitation.

My commitment to Trakia University is to share principles and applications of the psychology of Alfred Adler with students and faculty members. My plan today is to share with you some of the principles and applications that have proven so valuable to me and many others, both professionally and personally. My hope is that each one of you may find some concept or technique that will be helpful in your own personal or professional life. It is also my goal to make people aware of the fact that many principles for understanding behavior that they regard as facts of life are well represented in a systematic organized fashion in the work of Alfred Adler.

In the short period of time I have with you, I will not spend much time dealing with historical background, but let me note that Alfred Adler did his most prolific work between 1900 and his death in 1937. I was very fortunate to meet Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs at a convention in the United States in 1968. Dreikurs had worked with Adler in Vienna, especially at the child guidance centers that Adler had established. At the convention I observed Dreikurs provide a public family counseling demonstration. In the short span of that demonstration he seemed to help the family immensely. Then and there I decided I wanted to learn the principles and techniques that enabled Dreikurs to so quickly understand the psychodynamics operating within the family. Consequently I spent parts of two summers of postdoctoral work studying with Dreikurs and his colleagues in Chicago. I also devoted much of my time to reading Adler. I have spent the last forty years using and teaching these principles and techniques.

Here are some things I would like to share with you. I learned it is almost never helpful to ask, "What makes a child or adult behave or misbehave?" The answer is "nothing." Nothing *makes* a person behave or misbehave. Rather we understand that behavior is directed toward goals, and therefore, in order to understand behavior, we need to ask ourselves the important question: "What is this person trying to accomplish? What is he or she trying to achieve?"

Kurt Adler, the only son of Alfred Adler, was a renowned psychiatrist in New York City for many years. Dr. Kurt Adler taught us that the most powerful aid we have to offer the people we are trying to help is to help them understand more clearly what they are up to, to help them understand the purpose of their behavior. Far from being propelled by some past experience, we are actually moving toward goals we have set for ourselves. This

being the case, it becomes very important to train teachers and parents to understand mistaken goals of children in order for adults to be able to minimize the likelihood that children will find it useful to operate upon mistaken goals of behavior. Unfortunately, far too many adults fail to realize how they actually contribute to misbehavior at the very time they attempt to stop misbehavior. An example of this mistake is the adult who unwittingly helps a child to obtain recognition for misbehavior or helps a child to demonstrate his power through misbehavior.

Another of Adler's significant contributions was to help us understand that misbehavior and poor mental health are almost always compensations for feelings of inferiority. Adler wrote: "All the main problems of life are problems of human cooperation" and he emphasized the importance of finding our place among fellow human beings as "an equal among equals" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler did not offer this as a moral statement, but simply as a practical matter. His point was that when we treat one another as having equal value, when we treat one another with respect, we typically are able to interact successfully with one another. On the other hand, when that sense of respect is not present, the relationship is unstable and the trust that enables cooperation is absent. Therefore, it behooves all of us to be able to identify superiority/inferiority relationships and do what we can to reduce the prevalence of such relationships, to reduce them with children in the home and in the school, in our own lives with our spouses, with fellow workers, and in other social interactions.

Adler helped us understand how our inclination to avoid being in a position of social inferiority is so strong that no one will tolerate being in such a situation (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956). When you see a situation where someone seems to be agreeing to be in a position of inferiority, look again. Look more closely, because somehow, someday, the person who senses themselves to be in a position of inferiority is likely to—overtly or covertly—deny their cooperation to the person they sense is treating them disrespectfully. For this reason, educators need to do what they can to identify disrespectful relationships between teachers and students, between school directors and teachers, between teachers and teachers, as well as between students.

Adler helped us to understand the important role of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* has been translated from German in a number of ways, but most commonly it is regarded as a sense of community feeling or social interest. Adler maintained that each person has the capacity to develop a sense of connection to fellow human beings. To Adlerian psychologists, social interest is one of the building blocks of good mental health.

Adler wrote that the most important role of the mother is to spread the child's interest away from himself, to mother, to father, to other members of the family, and finally, to other members of the community.

An accurate definition of good mental health from the perspective of Adlerian psychology could be as follows: Good mental health is moving toward the problems that life presents in an effort to deal with the problems in a manner that is helpful to myself, and to others who may be influenced. The first part of the definition emphasizes the importance of being a responsible person. Rather than complaining or hesitating, the mentally healthy person may think, well, I wish this problem wasn't here, but fortunately, I have a good person to count on to deal with problems, and that person is me. The second part of the definition makes clear that good mental health does not mean considering only one's own interest, which is selfish, and it does not mean considering only the interests of others, which is not healthy, but good mental health involves attempting to solve problems in a manner that is of help to ourselves and others who may be influenced by the solution.

It is of utmost importance for the young child to learn to approach life's problems with concern for himself or herself, but also to learn to consider how the solution to this problem may influence me and my mother, or me and other family members, and as the child grows older, me and my classmates, or me and other members of the football team, or me and other members of the community, and ideally even me and others in my country, or finally, me and others in the world.

The closest we have to a guarantee that we may live in a world with peace and harmony is that we may capitalize upon using the capacity we possess to learn to care about the welfare of fellow human beings.

As a society we are *not* likely to move very quickly toward a world of adults who have learned to care about the welfare of fellow human beings and have learned to take responsibility to face problems, unless we do a better job of avoiding two very common mistakes in raising our children: we need to stop pampering our children and we need to avoid over-controlling them.

As a psychologist who has counseled families in North America and seventeen European countries, I want to offer you my professional opinion. In my country and almost surely in yours, the single most significant mistake we make as parents offering leadership to children is that we do too much for them and thereby teach them that others should solve their problems for them. When this mistake is made, children fail to learn to be responsible and they fail to learn that life calls for give and take. In fact, their understanding of give and take is that "you give and I take."

The second most common mistake we make is attempting to force our will upon our children. This mistake commonly results in children who are overtly or covertly resistant to authority. You may recognize that both these approaches of pampering and over control reflect superiority/inferiority relationships. We should not be surprised that such children attempt to

move away from a position of inferiority. The route away from inferiority that occurs to the pampered child is moving to a superior position by making a servant of his/her parents. The over-controlled child commonly demonstrates his/her power by refusing to cooperate with adults, either openly or secretly (Walton, 1980). Most importantly, children raised in these mistaken ways fail to actualize the capacity they have to learn to care about fellow human beings.

At this point I would like to take a moment to turn theory into practice by speaking about the most commonly diagnosed childhood disorder of our time. I am referring to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which is frequently referred to by its initials: ADHD.

In order to be diagnosed with ADHD, a child essentially must manifest a number of symptoms that involve a lack of attention to tasks in the classroom, highly active behavior, and impulsive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Sadly, I offer you the observation that clinicians, educators, and parents are so accustomed to looking for the *causes* of behavior, that they too often ignore the purposes of the behavior in these children. Professor Russell Barkley (1994, p. 1), who is among the prominent and prolific writers with regard to ADHD, has defined the condition as follows: "ADHD really can be described by one symptom, an impairment in inhibiting behavior and delaying a response. It is this problem with behavior inhibition that is the hallmark symptom of ADHD." Barkley's definition makes sense and is useful; however, he also has written an explanation of the etiology of ADHD that is very important for the therapist to question. Barkley (1990, p. 416) writes: "For most children, ADHD is a biologically based inborn temperamental style that predisposes them to be inattentive, impulsive, and physically restless as well as deficient in their capacity for rule-governed behavior."

In contrast to this view, let us give consideration to Pulitzer Prize finalist Robert Whitaker's (2006) conclusion based upon an extensive review of research. Whitaker writes:

While there have been claims made that ADHD is due to a chemical imbalance, there is no scientific evidence that shows that to be true. There is no biological test for ADHD; diagnosis, of course, is based upon an observation of a child's behavior. Thus all science today can tell us is this: There is no *known* biological abnormality in children diagnosed with ADHD. (p. 1)

If the critical influence is not biological abnormality, then where should therapists and other helpers look to understand the child's behavior? My experience leads me to conclude that a therapist who will look at the specific pattern of interaction of this child in his/her family life will normally become

aware of a greatly underdeveloped sense of social interest in the child, and a greatly underdeveloped sense of concern for fellow human beings. I noted earlier that Adler believed the most important role of parents is to spread the interest of a child to members of the family and out to society, but the focused therapist will be able to observe how the child diagnosed as meeting the criteria for the ADHD diagnosis, has very few opportunities to develop socially caring guides as part of his/her belief system. Such a child sees little or no value in delaying a response to stimuli in order to ever so briefly consider behavior-guiding inhibitions, because there is little in his/her private logic that the child could use to guide himself or herself toward caring and responsible behavior. In fact, the most common premise we find in the belief system of the ADHD child is: "People are in this world to be concerned about me, not for me to be concerned about them." The second most common premise is very much like this: "Adults will control your life if you give them the opportunity. You can bet they are not going to control me." (Walton, 2007).

Neither of these common components of the belief system of children manifesting ADHD symptoms is conjunctive in nature. Neither stimulates the child to move toward fellow human beings with a view toward considering the welfare of others. Contrarily, the beliefs noted are beliefs that dispose a child to self-absorbed behavior. The therapist's job is now clear: Along with both parents and teachers, he/she must structure guidelines that replace mistaken parenting or teacher techniques, and work in concert with them to win such a child over for society. Unfortunately, since many professionals are not aware of the Adlerian principles and techniques about which I have spoken, and since many professionals and pharmaceutical companies look for biological causes that can be influenced by drugs instead of also looking at the belief system of such children, children meeting the diagnostic criteria for ADHD are commonly treated with psychotropic drugs—the most common being Ritalin, the trade name for methylphenidate. This practice continues despite the fact that a very well-respected research group based at Oregon State University released a 731-page report known as the Drug Effectiveness Review Project. The group conducted an analysis of 2,287 studies—"virtually every investigation ever done on ADHD drugs anywhere in the world to reach its conclusions. To date, it is the most thorough and comprehensive evaluation of all research performed on ADHD drugs." Some of the remarkable results of the evaluation were as follows: "Good quality evidence . . . is lacking that ADHD drugs demonstrate improvement in global academic performance, consequences of risky behaviors, social achievements," and other measures. Furthermore, there is "no evidence on long term safety of drugs used to treat ADHD in young children," yet more than 2.5 million children in the U.S. alone take ADHD drugs (Oregon Health Sciences University, 2005).

At the very least let us look into the lives of these youngsters to determine what mistaken ideas influence their behavior, and to what extent they have learned to care about fellow human beings, instead of beginning by prescribing drugs for them.

As I leave the topic of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, let me say that the saving grace for all of us who were raised in some less than perfect way (which I assume includes all of us), is what Alfred Adler referred to as "The Creative Self." Adler proposed that when we come into this world we begin to look around and draw conclusions. We look at our physical self, we look at the parenting techniques our parents used, we look at the behavior our parents and other family members model, and we look at social and economic factors in the life of the family. However, Adler proposed that none of these factors force us to develop in any particular way. Rather, we look at this information and each of us decides what it means to us and we decide what we will do about it. In this fashion, we draw conclusions about ourselves and life and others and those conclusions constitute our personal belief system. This belief system is our creation. Our personality, our style of life, is simply the manifestation of our belief system in action.

So we see why Adler understood that the whole person really is more than the sum of his parts. He is all the physical and mental qualities he brings into this world, plus all his perceptions of environmental experiences, plus—the important addition—he is what he concluded from this data. This holistic approach to understanding behavior is another fundamental principle of Adlerian psychology.

The holistic principle could be called the life style principle. Thus, we see we choose our style of life and Adler maintains that in doing so, we attempt to move from a minus to a plus. A very important question becomes, what will each of us view as a plus? We may continually attempt to elevate ourselves above others through various routes and devices, but remember, we also have the capacity to learn to care about fellow human beings, feel connected to fellow human beings, and therefore take satisfaction from lending a hand to solving the problems that life presents in the company of others and for the welfare of society as a whole.

Such a choice demands the courage and confidence that allows one to finally conclude: "I am okay. I am worth one human being. I cannot be worth two human beings or only half a human being; that is settled." Now, arm-in-arm with my fellow human beings, let us work together to address the problems that face all of us.

The likelihood that we human beings will choose to form our thoughts in this positive manner will be greatly increased as children are exposed to respectful relationships with adults in the home and school.

Educators, psychologists, social workers, and counselors who are interested in the future of humanity will wish to have a hand in forging a

new relationship between young people and adults. This new relationship would be one in which adults do not fight with children, but do not give in. It would be a relationship in which adults respectfully invite young people forward to solve problems. It would be a relationship in which the use of temper is recognized as almost always being an effort to tyrannize. We need to show confidence in young people by inviting them forward to handle increasingly difficult tasks and problems in place of operating as if adults must solve problems for young people. We have given so much service and direction to young people that we truly run the risk of forgetting the remarkable capacity young people have to solve problems on their own. We can move toward a respectful partnership between children and parents and teachers and young people; a partnership where the exchange of ideas is always welcome, and young people learn to expect to carry much more responsibility for the educational process as well as for solving the routine tasks of life in the home.

We have a force amongst us we have not fully unleashed. I ask for each of you to do whatever you can to help bring about these reforms in the interest of young people and in the interests of humanity at large.

Now in closing I would like to speak not about young people, but about ourselves, about you and me.

Perhaps the most beautiful quality of being a human being is that we absolutely choose our attitude toward every situation we face. Here are some thoughts based upon principles of Adlerian psychology that help us to choose our attitudes wisely: I call them "How to Get Along with One's Self."

Most of you know the value of living life on the horizontal plane, living life as if we're all worth one human being, and that's settled. But, of course, sometimes our courage fails us, and we picture ourselves in certain areas, or at certain times, as needing to demonstrate our superiority or keep from revealing our inferiority.

I mentioned earlier that Kurt Adler maintained that the most powerful thing we have to offer our clients is to help them understand themselves, to understand what they are up to. I believe it is also the most powerful thing we have to offer ourselves.

If you want to get along with yourself, it is terribly important to understand yourself, to question your motives, to question what you're up to. You can do it in a lighthearted way, you can chide yourself, joke with yourself, just don't lie to yourself. Spot the disjunctive emotions and thoughts you experience: those are the emotions and thoughts that set us against others and are disrespectful of ourselves. These emotions or thoughts include anger, resentment, blame, hurt, feeling sorry for ourselves, occupation with self-importance and other self-elevating thoughts or restricting our behavior because of fear of falling short.

Replace these disjunctive emotions and thoughts with conjunctive emotions and thoughts—those that help us move toward fellow human beings. Catching yourself using disjunctive emotions and thoughts can bring a smile to your face and warmth to your body. Simply say, “I’m not going to do that. My effort is going to be to help, to lend a hand. I may not be perfect at it, but I’m really working at it.”

Recognize the courage and love of self and others you are manifesting at that moment. Encourage yourself at these moments. Consider, if someone else is encouraging to you, it’s very nice, but it’s out of your hands to make it happen. If you learn to encourage *yourself*, you have an endless supply of encouragement.

Finally, keep in mind that *this* moment is the only reality that exists right now. Whatever you want to be psychologically, be it right now. Don’t get ready to be it, just be it. Be it when you’re working in your garden, when you’re having a beer with a friend, be it in the midst of work, or with your children or with your spouse, be it in the grocery store or restaurant. Too often life is what’s happening while we’re getting ready to live it. Be it now, be it in this conference. Be the person you can be and want to be. Be it and you’ll find a happy, generous by-product. You’ll leave a trail of encouragement as you move through life—almost accidentally. People whose lives you touch will feel a little better for your having passed through their life that day. Your happiness will be more under your control and life will seem to have a way of working out for you—it will be because of what you are doing, but you won’t give yourself too much credit, you’ll just realize you’re using the potential that each one of us has.

Thank you.

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