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Structure & Unity of Neurosis; Reason, Feeling, & Emotion; Dream Theory

Chapter I: Character and Talent (1927) continues the argument that Adler began in the final chapter of Volume 5, that talent is not inherited, and that individual potential is not fixed. Abilities and “talents” cannot be separated from the totality of the personality. “We can judge potential performance only when we can determine an individual's total reactions, her total behavior pattern, her general style of life, her 'distance' from the normal goal of life.” We all have the potential for talent, but it must be developed and trained. “What would one of our modern vocational guidance psychologists have said to the young Beethoven? Would he have prophesied talent as a musician? Certainly not. He would have made a shoe salesman out of him, would have directed him to leave music strictly alone. And had Beethoven followed his advice, become a shoe salesman, the vocational guidance psychologist would have claimed that he was right. No musical genius would have developed in him!” Here Adler returns to one of his core concepts, that talent and smooth progress do not prepare us for greatness; what matters is how we overcome our difficulties and defects, how we struggle to improve the capacities we have. Beethoven offers a vivid example of Adler's theory, providing a confluence of interest, sensitivity, training, ambition, and courage.

In **Chapter II: The Feeling of Inferiority and the Striving for Recognition** (1927), Adler develops further his ideas on the basic need to compensate for the exaggerated feeling of inferiority with an increased, often unrealistic, always self-centered, quest for recognition. He cautions us not to demand more than a child can accomplish: “At this point most of our errors in education commence.” He insists that educators should never use physical or psychological punishment, ridicule children, or humiliate them in any way, as an increased feeling of inferiority leads to their increased need for recognition, usually in negative ways: “In the forefront of these manifestations we find pride, vanity, and the striving to conquer everyone at any price.” All this is counter-productive from the viewpoint of community-feeling and social

connectedness. Therefore, educators should do all they can to avoid intensifying, provoking, or in any way heightening a child's inferiority feeling, in order to spare that child from the compensatory, exaggerated striving for power.

In **Chapter III: Linkages Between Neurosis and a Joke** (1927), Adler introduces the concept of “frame of reference,” saying that a normal person and a neurotic have different frames of reference, even if they may verbally agree with one another about the right frame of reference. A humorous anecdote has similar strains: “While a listener to such an anecdote brings to it the normal frame of reference, the teller of the story suddenly introduces another frame of reference that relates only marginally to the first but otherwise provides a wholly new insight. These two frames of reference collide and thus give the story a comical, peculiar, and conspicuous aspect.” A joke “is a revolt against the normal social point of view.” The neurosis reminds us more of “a bad joke because the actual frames of reference appear invalid from the standpoint of IP.”

In **Chapter IV: More on Individual Psychological Dream Theory** (1927), Adler uses case studies to further illustrate his dream theory. He states, “The dream shows traces of a probing for a way the dreamer will attempt to solve an existing problem in accordance with his style of life.” However, the dream is also “1) a means toward self-delusion necessary for the dreamer to solve his problem not logically and realistically, but in accordance with his goal of superiority, and 2) the dream has the task of creating the appropriate mood in the context of this self-delusion.”

In **Chapter V: The Cause and Prevention of Neuroses** (1927), Adler focuses on the important role of the feeling of inferiority in causing neuroses. Hence, in order to prevent neuroses, we must do everything possible to minimize the child's natural feeling of inferiority, rather than heighten it in any way. He repeats life's three main tasks, of friendship, work, and love, saying that one of the major problems people face is a lack of courage in the face of concrete challenges posed by these tasks. If an individual chooses a wrong method of overcoming these challenges, she will be handicapped for the rest of her life because she was not able to solve her problems in a satisfactory way. This is one of the roots of neurosis: “In every single reaction we can recognize the attitude toward life if we have previously grasped the distortion of the personality.” Our aim should be to make children independent, free, self-confident, and

courageous. Adults must be re-educated and given a fresh start: “Patients must be approached with affection; the attitude of the physician must be parental. They must be stirred to the depths of their personality; they require honest and frank handling and no demands should be made upon them; we should simply seek to strengthen their courage, so that later they may feel independent.”

In **Chapter VI: Education for Courage** (1927), Adler champions educational ideals that are universal, intelligible, and generally beneficial. By “universal” he means “any system that tends to divide youngsters in the sense that it makes some to be subservient and others to become a ruling caste must be eliminated.” Educators must first encourage striving and courage among their pupils and not restrict them. We must help all children reach their goals, not merely some children. All problem children, neurotics, and criminals choose that path because “they lost courage for beneficial accomplishments.” Feeling excluded from the educational ideal, they miss the road that benefits all, choosing instead to be in conflict with society, and showing us “the total inadequacy of today's measures to rehabilitate them.”

In **Chapter VII: Individual Psychology and Science** (1927), Adler uses IP to discuss a paper, “Lying by Children and Young People as a Psychological Problem,” written by Karl Reininger, who was influenced by Charlotte Buhler. In examining the behavior of lying, Adler argues that IP has been able to find ways of interpretation that the other psychologies were not able to find. Interpreting individual problems is the business of IP, and without scientific rationale this would not be possible: “IP has demonstrated with scientifically irreproachable methods a way to find what is hidden that neither the sufferer nor other psychologists understand.” What is hidden generally includes the client's feeling of inferiority, lack of social interest, fictional goal in life, style of life, and psychological movement.

Chapter VIII: Alfred Adler on America (1927) consists of a summary of Adler's address to the International Association for Individual Psychology, after he had spent six months traveling in England and America. He was especially delighted with the highly enthusiastic response to all his lectures and courses in America, where so many people were involved in the social welfare movement, from large numbers of non-professional women, to physicians, psychologists, and educators. All of them wholeheartedly embraced the principles of IP, and

declared their eagerness to popularize Adler's teachings throughout their communities and in their many special institutes for young people. Under the heading, "The Striving for Esteem in America," Adler defines two important extremes in American life: "an extraordinary strong personal ambition and a strong striving for organized groups." This focus on competition, breaking records, and "being first" makes education "extremely difficult in light of the encroachment of ambition even into the lives of American children." He also notes that "women play a much more significant role in the cultural and social life" than in Europe. "However, since women effectively control only certain spheres of activities because they do not yet have the same opportunities as men, they have assumed some of these spheres exclusively for themselves, for example, the enormous striving for education that dominates the American people." Overall, he was very positive about the success of his trip and about America in general.

In **Chapter IX: Feelings and Emotions From the Standpoint of Individual Psychology** (1928), Adler explains that attitudes alone do not determine the actions of the individual; feelings and emotions play a role, too. Emotions may have biological roots, but IP is more interested in the psychological foundations. He rejects the psychoanalytic idea that anxiety arises because sexual impulses have been suppressed. "It can be taken for granted that every bodily and mental power must have inherited material, but what we see in mind and psyche is the use of this material toward a certain goal." Discussing social feeling at length, he states that the mother has a special role in the development of this emotion. "We can understand why all actions on the useless side of life are caused by a lack of social feeling, courage, and self-confidence." A lower degree of social feeling generally accompanies a greater feeling of inferiority, which we find in the life style of both spoiled and hated children, and in children with imperfect organs.

Chapter X: Erotic Training and Erotic Retreat (1928) addresses sexuality, love, and human relationships. In emphasizing the influence of early training on life style, Adler notes, for instance, "It is unquestionable that certain wrong ways of upbringing can lead to effeminate boys, or to girls who will posture themselves in masculine ways." Lack of proper training in social feeling and courage lead to overall discouragement, which often surfaces in sexual problems. Life style expresses itself in every sphere of life, including sexuality.

In **Chapter XI: The Burning of Widows and Widow Neurosis** (1928), Adler points out that the social circumstances of women in the first decades of the 20th century were very difficult for them, especially if they were widowed. Using several case studies, he examines the problems related to widowhood: “Frequently, a woman who suddenly becomes widowed has seemed earlier to be perfectly healthy. Suddenly, the situation changes.” After losing their husbands, women often suffer from the same difficulties that arise in men who become widowers: “depression, loss of weight, loss of sleep, and self-reproach.”

In **Chapter XII: Reason, Intelligence, and Retardation** (1928), Adler explores the difference between reason and intelligence. First discussing “social interest, identification, and empathy,” he relates social interest to common sense. To help define social interest, he uses the saying, “To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another.” Identification, or empathy, “always occurs according to the degree of social interest.” He then defines reason as “that intelligence which contains social interest” and which concentrates on what is socially useful. What we consider “reasonable” is generally understood as common sense. “Private intelligence”, or private logic, is used in the pursuit of neurotic goals, which defy common sense and lack social interest. He defines mental retardation as the inability to formulate a life plan. The truly retarded individual “is not subject to the laws of common sense nor does he have the intelligence which expresses itself in a goal of personal superiority. Thus we shall find in all problem persons, excluding the mentally retarded, that all movements are ‘intelligent,’ but that their goal of personal power-striving has misled them. They will strike us as abnormal because they contradict reason ‘which joins us all,’ and common sense. But they will always be congruently integrated in a system on the useless side of life.”

Chapter XIII: Neurotic Role-Play (1928) consists of a case study based on correspondence between Adler and a man who sought his help after attending one of his lectures. In the man's first letter to Adler, he describes his suffering from depression, physical weakness, and a constriction of the throat whenever he faces a new task. He includes a number of childhood memories, which Adler had emphasized in his lecture as being important in IP. The paper contains extensive quotations from the two letters, followed by Adler's interpretive comments. Adler gradually helps him understand the connection between his childhood, his early memories, and his life style: “Comprehending always means

comprehending the context, the uniform direction of the so-called conscious and unconscious.” In his second letter, the “client” describes how he has started to think differently about his life-situation and makes a self-diagnosis, stating that he now understands his problems better than earlier. He says, “I now believe that I could have led my life more courageously, and I shall try to do so.” One year later, the man visited Adler. He had lost all his neurotic symptoms without acquiring new ones.

Chapter XIV: Psychology and Medicine (1928) consists of a lecture Adler was invited to give on this topic. Speaking as an “Individual Psychologist, a practitioner, a theoretician, a psychologist, and a physician,” he describes his vision of the role of the physician as a psychologist. In fact, he believes that “in the future a medical practice could not be built without a knowledge of human nature.” To strengthen his argument that physicians need more education in psychology, he points out the many ways in which physical suffering influences psychological development, and the many ways in which psychological development influences physical suffering. He also proposes that physicians cannot appear as magicians, but merely as fellow human beings. Therefore, it is important to find the proper balance between omnipotence and therapeutic pessimism (“nothing can be done”). At the very least, a physician should act compassionately. He concludes with a case study, illustrating key aspects of IP theory in terms of mind-body relationships and the neurotic personality. “We will always see the striving for prestige as a significant factor for an understanding of the inner life.”

In **Chapter XV: The Psychology of Power** (1928), Adler elaborates on the dangers of the pursuit of power in all aspects of life: “The result of individual and social psychological inquiry is therefore: The striving for personal power is a disastrous delusion and poisons man's living together. Whoever desires the human community must renounce the striving for power over others.” As the antidote to striving for power, he presents the values and benefits of social interest, which, he argues, always prevails in the end. It cannot be smothered. He refers to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where Raskolnikov must, before committing a murder, first lie in bed a month and meditate on whether he is a louse or Napoleon. “We need the conscious preparation and advancement of a mighty social interest and the complete demolition of greed and power in the individual and in nations.”

In **Chapter XVI: Individual Psychology and the Theory of Neurosis** (1929), Adler focuses on the role of social feeling in individual development: “The physical weakness of the individual in the face of nature requires a sense of community to maintain life, and to force the development of a civilization and an organized division of labor. It probably is the weakness and inferiority of mankind in general, man's knowledge of death and threatening dangers, which produce social interest as an unavoidable complement and to provide relief.” Psychological failures, like neurosis, result from an inadequate attitude toward social issues, and the inability to cooperate. He does not accept the trauma theory: “All personal experiences have been assimilated early on by the fixed style of life.” This style of life is a unified whole, always unique to the individual, and all experiences are perceived through the lens of that style of life. Neither does Adler accept the Freudian view of the unconscious: “. . . social interest and the imminent striving for an ideal final form (the fictional goal) are the deepest motivating forces of a person's inner life. What Freud found in the unconscious, is not the motivating force but a later, misguided striving for power assimilated because of the flawed, deeper-lying style of life.”

Chapter XVII: A Consultation (1929) is a case study of a 12-year-old boy who is brought to Adler's educational consulting office. The younger of two boys, he is in remedial school and wets himself. The paper includes Dr. L.'s introductory report, his remarks, and Adler's views as recorded by a stenographer. The session begins with showing how Adler interprets Dr. L.'s report on the boy, sentence by sentence. The rest of the chapter consists of a transcript of Adler's conversation first with the mother only, then with the mother and the boy. An example of his interpretation of the report: “When we hear of two brothers where the older has developed well and cannot be overtaken, the younger brother most of the time is a problem. If the younger advances well and comes close to the older and threatens the older's status, the older brother becomes a problem. That experience has been confirmed in this case. The older brother probably does not fail to point out to the younger brother that he is in remedial school.” An example of his encouragement to the boy: “You are a very able boy. You think you can't do this silly arithmetic. I will help you to become good at arithmetic. We'll do that skillfully and it will be fun for you. I also was poor in arithmetic and then someone showed me how it's done. Then I moved to the head of the class in arithmetic. Come back soon. Also when someone criticizes you

at home don't get angry right away and wet yourself. You must help me. Can I count on you?" Adler demonstrates how, in working with children, therapists must find a way to put themselves "at the same level" as the child, building a friendly relationship, and winning the child over emotionally. He shows us this art of establishing a warm, inviting connection with a child many times in successive volumes of *CCWAA*.

In **Chapter XVIII: Sleeplessness** (1929), Adler begins by advising that we must first exclude all possible organic reasons for sleeplessness. If we find no organic reasons, then we need to examine how this symptom fits in with the whole personality, and how the person may be using insomnia: "We will find that every person who does not sleep has a certain purpose which is supported by not sleeping. We will always find another person involved. Sleeplessness is an effective way of hitting at this other person, who usually is nearby. Married men and women hit at each other." Sleeplessness is also often used as a tool of competition: "I could accomplish so much if only I had more sleep." He concludes with, "Sleeplessness occurs only in a situation in which a person is confronted with a problem for which she is not prepared."

Chapter XIX: The Individual Criminal and His Cure (1930) consists of Adler's presentation to the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor (in the United States). In discussing the nature of criminality, he examines the impact of private logic, focusing on egotism, greed, and the exclusion of other people. He begins with the relativity of the concept of normality: "The normal mind and normal individual do not exist. We all vary and only if we are fortunate and do not suffer from great mistakes, do we feel normal and behave correctly." All failures in life are really failures in constructing a socially beneficial style of life. The role of psychology is to find out why so many people have unproductive, "anti-social" attitudes which do not correspond with cooperation and social interest. The most important task of education is to train children in social interest, because neglected or pampered children are not able to cooperate. Those with the greatest lack of social interest, criminals, consider that all others exist merely to satisfy their needs and desires. Many people find a feeling of superiority in resisting laws, police, and authorities in general. Adler proposes that special centers for crime prevention should be established where "the methods of psychoanalysis, the gland specialists, the brain-pathologists, the behaviorists, and so forth should be tried and compared." Appended to this paper is a summary of the remarks by a number of major authorities on prisons in this country.

In **Chapter XX: Individual Psychology** (1930), Adler elaborates on key principles of IP, emphasizing the primacy of the fictional goal in driving all psychic development. This goal, established in the first four or five years of life, “has not only the function of determining a direction, of promising security, power, and perfection, but also should awaken the necessary feelings which promise them. Thus, the individual mitigates her sense of weakness in the anticipation of achieving her goal.” The individual's “sense of weakness,” her perceived feeling of inferiority, is fundamentally related to her goal. “If there is any causal factor in the psychic mechanism, it is the common and often excessive sense of inferiority.” The basic task of Adlerian therapy is to find the guiding thread of a client's life (her fictional goal), which we must accomplish by comparing all the details in her life: “Only a perfect coincidence of the whole and all the parts gives us the right to say, I understand.”

In **Chapter XXI: Again -- The Unity of the Neuroses** (1930), Adler expands his ideas on the holistic nature of the personality: “Indeed, we can only uncover the style of life when by abstracting we exclude less suitable ways of expressing it. It is the same with recognizing a style in painting, architecture, and music.” Thus, we find the essence of the individual's personality by studying and comprehending the person's usual, repeated ways of expressing himself. In commenting on Gestalt psychology, Adler says that followers of this approach understand the idea of the dominating wholeness. However, he is not satisfied with mere gestalt; every note must be related to the melody: “We are satisfied only when we have recognized in it the original driving attitude, for example in Bach, his life style.” The paper also includes a critical analysis of psychoanalysis, and case studies illustrating Adler's theories.

Chapter XXII: A Case of Enuresis Diurnal: Stenographic Report of a Counseling Session on Child-Rearing (1930) presents the problems caused by enuresis, which Adler defines as a movement that has the goal of establishing contact with the mother: “The child speaks through enuresis: 'I am not ready yet. I still have to be watched over.'” As in Chapter XVII: “A Consultation” (1929), the session begins with Adler's analysis of the report about the boy, with a line-by-line interpretation. Then he calls in the mother, “Try sometimes not to chide him and not to nag him. I would say to him, 'You can do it!' I would praise him and show him that I like him. He needs evidence that he is liked. Then he will do well.” When she leaves, he invites the boy into his office and

talks with him in a friendly, encouraging way, finding his strengths and establishing a relationship. After the boy leaves, Adler says, “Now is the time for encouraging the boy. Talking about his faults now would not be encouraging. If he returns in one month and we see that he is coming along, it might then be the right time to talk about it.” (Editor's note: In Adlerian therapy, we do not begin with the client's mistakes, with his weakness. We begin by building a relationship, then encouraging him in a direction away from his mistakes so that later, after he has had some success and feels stronger, he may be in a better position to understand what he used to do. Timing is crucial. As Adler demonstrates repeatedly, encouragement is an art.)

Chapter XXIII: Individual Psychology and Crime (1930) returns to the same topic as Chapter XIX: “The Individual Criminal and His Cure” (1929). Here, Adler points out that he has not been inquiring so much into particular crimes as into the lives of individual men and women. He says that all people, criminals or not, strive to reach a psychic goal in the future, by attaining which we will feel strong and complete. He refers to John Dewey, the American philosopher, who calls this phenomenon “the striving for security.” It is not this striving as such that makes a criminal, but the direction his striving takes. A criminal fails to understand the demands of social living, or to feel concern for others. Adler does not believe criminals are typically insane, and rejects any ideas of biological or environmental determination. Some psychotic criminals exist, of course, but these cases are rare. Criminal actions are planned, often presuming a high level of private logic, but with severely deficient or totally non-existent social interest: “A criminal is not interested in others. He can cooperate only to a certain degree. When this degree is exhausted, he turns to crime. The exhaustion occurs when a problem is too difficult for him.” Because the roots of this evil are in the development of young people, he believes schools should offer educational counseling. If a young person starts down the path of a criminal lifestyle, someone should be able to stop this mistake early, before any serious offenses are committed. Experts should be available to discuss with children their individual problems and to solve these problems in a constructive, creative way.

Chapter XXIV: The Meaning of Life (1931) focuses on a subject that permeates Adler's thinking, connecting all his theoretical constructs. First, he explores the division of labor in society, which leads to the necessity of cooperation. We find the meaning of life in the context of

social living, in our response to the three tasks of life: friendship, work, and love. We reveal our level of social interest in all our expressive movements within these three arenas of life: “Those who have demonstrated belonging to the community understand common sense. Feeling valuable results from a successful contribution to others and is the only direction in which the average inferiority feelings of people experience a successful compensation. To be valuable means to have contributed. Thus, human happiness can be found only in applied social interest.”

In **Chapter XXV: Trick and Neurosis** (1931), Adler maintains that “tricks” are a pervasive quality of life. All human achievements and inventions are products of some tricks; poetry, dreams, and magic metaphorically represent tricks. However, in human neuroses tricks serve to keep a person permanently alienated from social realities, which Adler illustrates with numerous examples. The Individual Psychologist aims to show the client his trick and convince him that he has employed this trick without knowing it, generally to serve as a means of avoiding challenges. IP shows him “that he has been utilizing symptoms in an attempt to maintain his high position and avoid a 'defeat.' It makes him realize that, in his feeling of insecurity, the earliest impressions of his childhood have led him to the use of a trick. And it shows him that his insecurity is not real; that childhood impressions are not an adequate foundation on which to build a whole life. It throws light upon his life style and makes him see how, in his desire for relief, he has attempted to play tricks on life.”

Chapter XXVI: The Structure of Neurosis (1931) closes this volume with Adler summarizing all aspects of IP, showing how his philosophy, pedagogy, and psychotherapy form a coherent, interdependent whole. Many quotations are included here because this chapter provides such a thorough overview of his theories and how they connect.

He begins with “the concept of mind and soul,” rejecting any mechanistic approach that ignores the psychic life: “Many call themselves psychologists who in fact are physiologists and, according to the structure of their scientific training, eliminate the concept of the soul or think of it in a mechanistic way. The psychologist, however, takes it for granted that a basic conception of psychic life includes the various manifestations of the personality. While he arranges these manifestations in definite order and direction, he needs speculative insight to understand

the context of data which may lead beyond the province of experience. But even here, in the sphere outside immediate or tangible experience, no evidence precludes the assumption of psychic life or disproves the existence of it. Let us assume, therefore, that the soul is a part of life.”

Placing all phenomena relating to the psychic life in the context of space-time relationships, he proceeds to his concept of life as motion: “All psychic life can be interpreted in terms of movement,” and “every movement has a goal.” In order to understand psychic life, we must understand how the goal originates. While all movement strives toward the general “goal of overcoming,” from a felt minus toward a felt plus, we must be able to discern the “particular direction of movement” of each individual client. All children are born with different potential, and can respond to the same environmental influences in different ways. But perhaps most important in their development is “the creative power of the individual.” This creative power “translates into movement toward the overcoming of an obstacle all the influences upon her and her potential.” However, certain factors lead her to mold her life in a certain direction, such as: having inferior organs; being pampered; or being neglected, unwanted, or ugly. “The basic, underlying structure uniting all these types begins with a feeling of insecurity, which is characteristic of all failures.” From the way in which people approach the three main tasks of life, (friendship, work, and love), we can determine the level of their felt insecurity or inferiority, and the degree of their preparation in social feeling: “The insecure ones construct a life style which shows a lack of social interest, because an insecure individual is always more concerned with herself than with others.” This lack of interest in others is the core of all neuroses, even though the neurotic may seem to show interest in others with overly ambitious plans to “reform the whole world.” The higher, or more unrealistic the goal, the greater the degree of the individual's inferiority feeling. Both the neurotic and the criminal suffer from this feeling and try to compensate for it, but the criminal actively opposes others; whereas, the neurotic exploits them.

Adler then elaborates further on the “law-of-movement of neurotics.” In order to understand an individual, we must distinguish “the goal, direction, and form of her “movement.” Different general types of movement include: a) establishing distance as a safeguard (fainting, indecisiveness, anxiety neuroses); b) a hesitating attitude (stuttering, insomnia, agoraphobia); c) the detour around the solution (compulsion neuroses); d) the “narrow path of approach” (attempting only selected

parts of a solution to a problem). In the psychic process, we do not find “only the emotional or the mental side, only the action or volition. The psychic process comprises the whole of an individual.” Hence, Adler's theory of personality and psychotherapy are rooted in the unity of the personality, a unity expressed as movements “determined by a goal.” Understanding a neurotic client then becomes a task of interpreting her movements, her neurotic goal, and helping her change it in a more socially useful direction. (Editor's note: Classical Adlerian Depth Psychotherapy focuses on uncovering and re-directing this psychological movement and fictional goal.)

He concludes: “Thus, we come to the following conception of the structure of neurosis: all neurotic symptoms are safeguards of individuals who do not feel adequately equipped or prepared for the problems of life, but instead carry within themselves merely a passive appreciation of social feeling and interest. As soon as we learn to recognize the meaning of this attitude, we realize that we are dealing with pampered individuals, or those who have not become cooperative fellow-beings because in their earliest childhood they were trained to utilize the services of others for the solution of their own problems.”