

Tomasi, D. 2024. *Psychotherapy: Essence, Experience, and Examination*. Foreword to Adler, D. 2024. *What we really need – Experiences of a psychoanalyst*. New York, NY: Ibidem Verlag / Columbia University Press,

Original: Adler, D. 2023. *Was wir wirklich brauchen: Erfahrungen eines Psychoanalytikers*. Stuttgart, D: Schattauer / Klett-Cotta Verlag



COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Psychotherapy: Essence, Experience, and Examination

Foreword to

Dieter Adler: What we Truly Need – Experiences of a Psychoanalyst.

In any serious, scientific, and ethically justified healthcare profession, the focus should be always on the overall health, treatment, improvement, and amelioration of the patient. What clinical and professional background should therefore a mental health professional have?

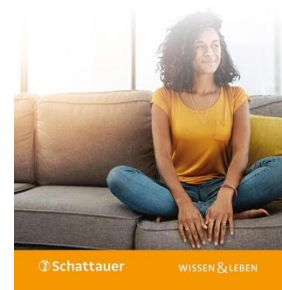
In his book, Adler does not want to simply offer a quick guide to self-help. In fact, he is clear about the fact that this is not the purpose of the book: “Maybe I’ll write one sometime: *How you can reliably become independent of self-help books.*” In fact, this book is a reflection on a 30-year-long professional career in which the author has learned to ask questions, to listen attentively, and to help shed light on some of the most complex and hidden aspects of what makes us human. To be sure, this does not mean that this book does not present a practical approach to well-being, quite the contrary. The author lists a series of areas the patient can focus on, in order to achieve a higher state of balance, healing, and happiness. Amongst these we find socialization, upbringing, and community, making friends, understanding and working on one’s emotions and the emotions of others, staying physically and mentally active, finding a sense of security and confidence, maintaining a sense of curiosity, finding a work-life balance and rediscovering peace and calmness, having goals, purposes, and meaning in life, and of course, understanding those negative, self-sabotaging mechanisms and processes which hinder such developments.

Dieter Adler
What We Truly Need
Experiences of a Psychoanalyst



ibidem

Dieter Adler
Was wir wirklich brauchen
Erfahrungen eines Psychoanalytikers



Schattauer WISSEN & LEBEN

In this sense, Adler might remind us of other scholars and researchers such as Abraham Maslow, but his work is, by his own admission, closer to that

of Igor Caruso and Arno Gruen. In fact, in the last part of this volume, one could find influences as wide and far as Viktor Emil von Gebstattel or Rudolf Allers. This also means that Adler's work is important not only from a clinical perspective, but also from a social one. In his attentive and insightful analysis, Adler juxtaposes very difficult and profound concepts such as Chaos and Passion to very practical areas of self-improvement, for instance motivation and job search. Furthermore, the author's ethics are apparent throughout the book, which is essential in any advice on how to help fellow human beings. In Chapter 5, *Responsibility and self-care*, Dieter Adler writes that "This chapter is particularly close to my heart." And it shows in the particular care he displays in analyzing it.

What is even more interesting, and useful to the person who is looking for guidance, motivation, and help, is the fact that Adler does not shy away from stating the difficulties of such a process, in a clear and direct manner. He writes: "We humans always live in a contradiction between needs that benefit ourselves and needs that benefit the community." The author's approach is nurturing and kind, yet firm and balanced.

Dieter Adler also embraces one of the most useful pieces of advice in psychotherapy, namely the fact that thoughts and emotions are not the same. More in detail, thoughts and emotions do not always align, which means that they might be disconnected, or that they might need to be kept at a healthy distance, in order to master self-care and self-control. The same can be said about action. In other words, one needs to be very careful to avoid being led only by strong emotions in life. One also needs to understand that "thoughts are just thoughts" sometimes, and that we are not forced to act upon them. In Chapter 3, Adler writes that: "Thoughts are an attempt to interrupt the immediacy of reactions that follow feelings and to deconstruct and reconstruct the triggering situation without feeling or affect, and above all without fear. Instead of running away from the fire, it may make sense to head straight for it and risk burns rather than being suffocated by the smoke in a dead end." This helps face our inner demons, label them and put them in their proper place. This is also key to progressive exposure and response prevention, a fundamental psychotherapeutic technique in dealing with traumas and obsessive-compulsive disorder. And Adler knows this very well.

Elsewhere in the book, Adler talks about "deconstructing and reconstructing." Certainly, one could see how this might be much more aligned with a sense of "suspension of judgment" in the neo-post-modernist, neo-psychoanalytic tradition. It is nevertheless interesting to observe that the very last two sections of the book deal with "The Meaning of Life" and "What is Luck?" These are certainly not lines of investigation traditionally (pun intended) aligned with the contemporary versions of deconstructivism or hyper-relativism, which are less interested in discovering and discussing truth and reality than in a puritanistic moralizing stance against anything these two terms represent.

And yet, the author does not offer here any shortcuts or even the slightest guidance in a universalist sense. He writes that “The meaning of life is as meaningless as the philosopher's stone.” In this sense, i.e. the “sense of the ultimate lack of sense,” the author appears to follow the most common postmodernist tropes fighting against anything certain, anything universal, anything truly valuable, from true statements to moral rules, to mathematics and logic. And yet, the author is also ready to acknowledge that the reason—the “true meaning” one could infer or, perhaps, deduce—for this attitude is to save patients, hurt individuals who are internally and externally broken, suffering, and struggling, from becoming preys of self-styled and impromptu-improvised gurus, who might offer false promises in exchange for further pain and enduring desperation.

Certainly, one could still argue with the stance against objective or universal meaning in life, but one has to acknowledge the importance and the ethics of *primum non nocere* (“First, do no harm”) in protecting patients from hurt, damage, and abusive relationships of all kinds. In this sense, we can then understand the essence, experience, and examination of psychotherapy. It is, after all, a rediscovery of truth and reality, which not only protects individuals from self-harm and being harmed by others, but also sheds light on the path toward self-discovery, against fallacies, ideologies, and brainwashing. *What we Truly Need, indeed.* Said as a true psychotherapist.

Acad. Prof. Dr. David Tomasi

What We Truly Need. Experiences of a Psychoanalyst
Dieter Adler - Ibidem Press

Finding happiness and contentment: What makes us truly content and what lures us down the wrong path.
How to live more authentically: Draw courage from the experiences of a psychoanalyst to fight for yourself!

A psychoanalyst takes stock after thirty years on the “other side of the couch.” What has really helped his patients? What does happiness mean and how can we achieve it? Adler concludes that in the end, it was always the seemingly simple changes that really helped: making friends, finding a sense of security and confidence, having goals in life, rediscovering curiosity, and taking everything much more calmly. Above all, to draw on a deeply felt sense of one’s own self, rather than on external and internal constraints. To be authentic and to identify and implement the things in life that bring true satisfaction. This book helps readers find out for themselves: what do I truly need? How do I become secure in myself? How can I shape the best possible version of my life?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dieter Adler is a German psychoanalyst trained at the German Psychoanalytical Association (DPV) with prior training in social work and psychology. He is a member of the DPV and of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA). Adler has additional training in family systems therapy, guided affective imagery, child and adolescent psychotherapy, group analysis and group psychotherapy, as well as intensive short-term psychodynamic therapy (IS-TDP). He has worked in his own private practice as a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, group analyst, and child and youth therapist for thirty years. Adler is also active as a teaching therapist and supervisor in the training of psychotherapists and advises colleagues in the process of establishing, running, and optimizing their own offices. He leads professional development seminars, workshops, and conferences. Adler is the founder and chair of the German Network of Psychotherapists, headquartered in Bonn. In his leisure time, Adler is a filmmaker. He has produced a variety of documentaries and a short feature film.