The Psychology of Courage: Striving and Overcoming "*In-Spite-Of*"

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Problems of living today seem worse than ever as fears dictate our thoughts, feelings, and actions at home, school, and work and in society. The discussion of courage is hence necessary as we confront the meaning of existence and the challenges of fostering individual wellbeing and creating a better world for all. *Courage* is intimately related to Nietzsche's concept of will to power in which will is a given feature we have at birth and we have the power to affirm our living and the ability to *overcome* life hurdles as we *strive* toward actualization. The purpose of this chapter is to present how Individual Psychology by Alfred Adler and the contemporary meaning centered existential positive psychology inspired by Frankl share same philosophical upbringings and many theoretical similarities. Together they provide the most commensurate framework open to a collaborative understanding of what courage is and how courage and its co-requisite attitudes give us strength to self affirm *in-spite-of* the most difficult occurrences in life.

Will to Power, Overcoming and Striving

Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964/1979) noted the similarity between existential psychology and Individual Psychology (IP). They credited Adler for his influence on existentialist and humanistic psychological theorists such as Sartre, Maslow, May and Frankl who were explicit regarding the linage from Adler. They wrote that existential psychology is known to be in the system of Adlerian psychology in that it "sees man as a unique being, fundamentally concerned with the meaning of his existence and with plans and projects to solve his existential programs." (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964/1979, p. 8)

Adler discussed Nietzsche's concept of *will to power* as the root to his theory of the guiding fiction in relation to the striving for superiority as a compensatory response to inferiority (Adler, 1966). To Nietzsche, "only where there is life, there is also will: not will to life but…will to power. There is much that life esteems more highly than life itself; but out of the esteeming itself speaks the will to power." (Kaufmann, 2013, p. 206). Power to Nietzsche is to have the pleasure principle repudiated as the pursuit of power is more important than to have more life and the pursuit of happiness. Power is enjoyed only as more power. One enjoys not its possession but its increase. (Ansbacher, 1972). To have power is to expand, grow, self-transcend and self overcome. Here, as Adler was influenced by "The Psychology of As If" by Hans Vaihinger, power means the fictious guiding ideal of perfection (not power over others). Power to Adler means *striving* from a minus to a plus, completion, perfection, or in sum, superiority (Yang, 2017).

Yang, Milliren, and Blagen (2010) believe that the will to power in the context of IP is related to the creative power in our innate longing for perfection and the resultant *overcoming*. It would be a mistake to simply regard "power" as the goal of self-ideal, the goal of superiority, and the goal of overpowering others. Although, uses of will to power in IP literature were rather disconcerted, to Adler, the will to power is equivalent to the *striving* for perfection, a compensatory force inherent in us to overcome our inferior feeling. The concept behind the expressions of power or perfection is *overcoming*.

"Of particular significance in the course of my examinations, was finding the importance extending over the entire lifespan of overcoming, of the onset of difficulties. This seems to lead to an apparent paradox that perhaps great achievements regularly come from

courageously overcoming obstacles, and are not a consequence of original aptitude, but rather the absence of aptitude." (Adler, 2003)

The creative power creates an urge for us "*as if*" we were to *overcome* imperfections in all things (Stone, 2006, 2008). The creative power moves us toward the goal of perfection as a compensatory response to our environment. The striving to overcome (or striving for power) is also called the "goal of striving", which we are born with.

"Striving is the very activity of life. Life is movement towards an end state—not only that which we know, but also that towards which we can only hope and see "as if" it exists. Not only the minus of desire and the plus of satisfaction and completion; but also that striving towards which a given individual lives as his or her ultimate concern, final goal, "eternal destiny." (Mansager, 2003, p. 65)

Inferiority is the cause of striving for superiority. IP regards all human striving as a struggle for perfection, a movement that leads from a minus to a plus situation (Adler, 1956). Psychologically, striving for superiority and perfection is the governing dynamic force that is the most important factor to understanding Adler's view of one's unified personality. The goal of *striving* is also for power, security, completion, overcoming, ultimate adaptation, and self-enhancement when Adler spoke of the normal individuals. Ultimately, *striving* is a matter of spiritual overcoming or self transcendence. While self-transcendence is a universal construct embedded in all spiritual teaching. It is directly linked to the IP's concept of social interest (Leak & Leak, 2006; Yang et al., 2010).

Community Feeling via the Interplay of What Is and What Should Be

For IP, the quest of meaning is only meaningful in the organic context of wholeness and purpose of human nature (Adler, 2003). Embedded in each human being is the universal goal of

seeking a sense of belongingness that brings meaning of social living. This assumption in IP is expressed in the term, social interest or community feeling. Social interest means both a subjective attitude and objective abilities. With social interest as a state of mind, the individual acts as if he/she is part of the whole that wants to be the "master of his fate with an effective regard for the welfare of others: "But only the activity of an individual, who plays the game, cooperates and shares in life can be designated as courageous." (Adler, 1964/1979, p. 60)

Social interest functions as a mediating factor for the reconciliation of the individual subjective aspiration and the external life demands. Our beliefs in "as ifs" or what should be (social evolution) and "things as they might be" or what is (the present needs) can be graphically presented in a diagonal model of cooperation/acceptance and contribution/participation on the horizontal and vertical continuum as the following. The ability to cooperate is the ability to give and take via the relationship with others in the early family, schools and community. To contribute means the individual's goal of *striving* is in the interest of self and the welfare of others. The horizontal and the vertical axes also depict what Tillich (1952/2000) discussed as two sides of self, one is the self-acceptance or individuation and, the other, self as a part or participation.

Social Interest as a Measure of Mental Health
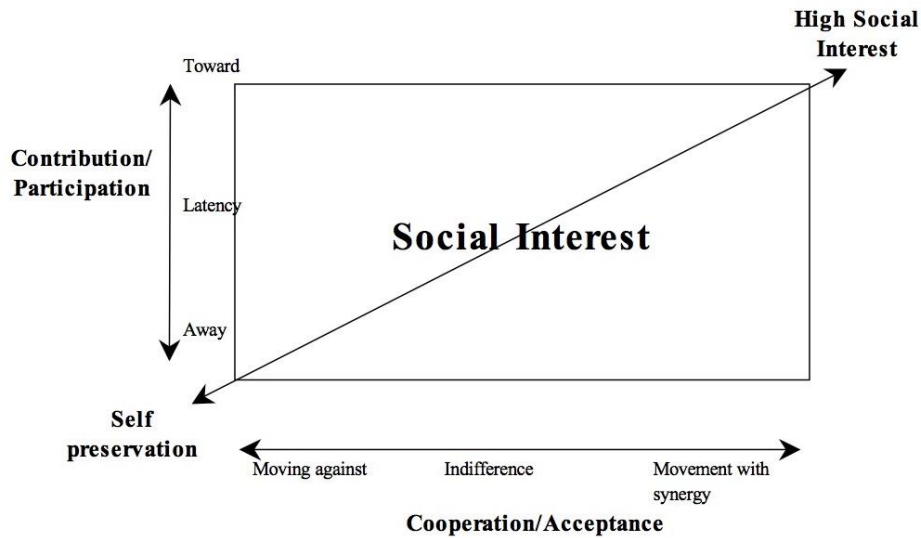
The vertical axis of contribution /participation and the horizontal axis of cooperation/acceptance interplay to generate the dynamic of our movement of either toward social interest or self-preservation.

Adler viewed life as presenting the individual with two, often contradictory, demands. On the one hand, the individual had to be capable of meeting the acute problems of the existing environment; s/he had to have the capacity to cooperate. On the other hand, the individual had to have the capacity to make a contribution so s/he could meet the demands for social improvement. The resolution of this dilemma requires that the individual to employ an evaluative attitude when he/she constantly negotiates with self and others for the balance between present needs and the demands of evolution. In so doing, one must have courage to transcend fear, anxiety, ambivalence and feeling stuck in order to move onward in one's development of social interest. It is within this context, a mentally healthy attitude toward life pertains a feeling of self-worth and a sense of belonging.

"Such a state of mind and attitude give him more than a feeling of social interest, for he

behaves as a part of the whole of mankind, he feels at home in a conception of the world

as near as possible to the real world, and he has courage and common sense, social

functions which are frustrated among all failures. He is ready to accept the advantages of

our social life and is a good loser whenever disadvantages cross his way. He is and wants

to be the master of his fate with an effective regard for the welfare of others." (Adler,

1956, p. 156)

Suffering, Striving for Meaning, and Self-Transcendence

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.

– Allport (in Frankl, 1946/1985)

Yang, Milliren, Blagen (2010) suggested that in psychology, we must ask such questions

as what are the causes of suffering? How could these conditions be eliminated? How do we

differ in our responses to suffering? What are the therapeutic values of suffering? What could

deliver us from vulnerability? What is the meaning of suffering and under what conditions can it

make us more human? Recognition of meaning in suffering cannot be experienced without

knowing how we suffer and for whom do we suffer which Frankl called "main avenue to

meaning" (Wong et al., 2012).

Suffering thus must be understood within the psychosocial and spiritual contexts. In IP,

suffering is part of our natural *strivin*g toward meaning (Yang, 2011). In our suffering, we are

faced with the directions of striving toward either normal self-enhancement in the interest of

others, or a safeguarding tendency endlessly *strivin*g for private perfection. The individual's

characteristic approach to life and one's life goal of perfection have a defining effect on how the

person sees the cause and use of his/her symptoms of suffering.

Suffering to Frankl means both the frustrated will to meaning and possibilities of the fulfillment of meaning. Leontiev (Wong et al., 2012) traced back to Adler as one of the first authors who attempted the psychology of motivation on the basis of the idea of *Sinn* (personal meaning) but recognized Frankl's contribution as most elaborated. The author also wrote "Frankl deduced the whole human activity from the basic striving to discover a meaning of one's life and to fulfill it" (p. 5). Frankl furthered the concept "will to power" in the tradition of Nietzsche and Adler into *will to meaning* in that we strive to fulfill meaning in our experience and to realize our value.

According to logotherapy, the *striving* to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in men. That is why I speak of a "will to meaning' in contrast to the pleasure principle (or as we could also term it "the will to pleasure") on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the "will to power" stressed by Adlerian psychology.' (Yalom, 1980, p. 444).

Similar to Adler's view of how the individual must resolve the dilemma of two contradictory demands of what is and what could be with social interest, Yalom (1980) also observed that meaning gives birth to values that lead to our actions of deciding on "what Is" and "what can be done" in our life. Yalom pointed out that the meaning of meaning is problematic and is often confusing when used interchangeably with words such as purpose and significance. Nevertheless, studies of human being's craving for meaning and the feeling of meaninglessness make clear individuals' needs and crisis that in turn provide strategies to psychotherapy. Meaninglessness is a symptom of many psychological problems originated from what Frankl termed as existential vacuum/frustration and existential neurosis.

VERSION 1

Embracing and transcending the dark side of human experiences is one of the main thrusts of Wong's (2011) endeavor of broadening positive psychology. Wong extended Frankl's construct on tragic optimism to include the components of acceptance of what cannot be changed, affirmation of the inherent meaning and value of life, self-transcendence, faith in God and in others, and courage to face and overcome adversity. Wong believes that the conceptual model of tragic optimism has contributed to a mature positive psychology in that:

> "in our state of despair and helplessness, we discover the power of meaning and faith; in our brokenness, we hear calling to bring healing to others; in our suffering, we encounter joy and serenity; and in our fears and vulnerability, we discover the defiant, heroic courage." (Wong, 2011, p. 252)

Wong expanded Frankl's logotherapy to be Meaning Therapy (MT) and Existential Positive Psychology (EPP, Wong, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2016a) with a focus on the quest of meaning and purpose. EPP continues to honor Frankl's view of discovering meaning via creative, experiential and attitudinal values with the belief that a true positive psychology must go beyond the traits of strength or pursuit of happiness to embrace the dark side of living such as suffering. The EPP is a model of self-transcendence that facilitates the individual who faces existential anxieties such as death anxiety to uncover the meaning capacity and develop death acceptance. EPP pertains to "the human drama of courage, creativity and celebration of life in the midst of suffering and death." Wong (2016a).

The will to meaning, together with a cognitive factor of meaning of life represent the two motivational factors of self- transcendence give the foundation of four defining characteristics of self-transcendence. They are a shift in focus from self to others, a shift of values that moves from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, an increase of moral concern, as well as emotional elevation

(Wong, 2016a). According to Wong, the will to meaning is rooted in the spiritual dimension of human nature. The ever-expanding cycles of self-transcendence is not only a path to meaning but also a way of contributing to spiritual growth the incorporate greater love for more people and greater loss of the self as the center of the world.

The Psychology of Courage

Commonality exists in the above discussions from IP and EPP theoretical frameworks in that human striving is value and goal oriented; there is social context to meaning that guides one's self-transference; adversities must be present prior to courage that summons the innate life force of striving and overcoming, as well as that courage is a task of spirituality. When we ask a question such as "what is courage?" we also ask the questions of "Courage for what purpose?" and "for whom?" our courage is directed to. Courage finds its expressions in our thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to others. We cannot help but noticing that the acts of courage are characterized by selflessness and other directedness. Courage is an intrinsic life force that allows us to recognize the goal of the common goodness as we seek our own actualization. From the vantage point of IP, Yang, Milliren and Blagen (2010) defined courage as the creative life force from within and without that moves us forward in the interest of self and the other in the presence of difficulties. Wong (2017a) wrote:

> "for Frankl, courage is described as 'the defiant power of the human spirit.' Courage is an emotional, volitional, and spiritual strength that empowers us to take a defiant stand for what is right and to pursue a worthy goal consistent with our core values and ethical responsibility despite dangers, adversities, and external pressures to surrender."

Existential courage (i.e. defined by May as "to make being and becoming"; Wong, 2016a) is specifically related to (1) the courage to grow up in the face of an uncertain future and

confusing demands; (2) the courage to live in the face of inevitable sufferings, such as sickness, loss, or death; (3) the courage to pursue your dreams or life goals despite obstacles, risks, and failures; and (4) The courage to do the right thing and stand up for your values in the face of threats and real dangers (Wong, 2016b). These elements of courage concur with the author that an evaluative attitude and an affectionate sentiment toward others are necessary for true courage. We recognized that courage, both a self and social ideal, implies the use of reason and passion we possess while overcoming impediments of our living. In addition, courage sometimes takes the form of the spiritual energy while it is guided by a higher communal value of what is good for the whole. (Yang et al., 2010).

Definitions of courage in positive psychology are presently inadequate. Peterson and Seligman defined courage as "Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal." (Yang et al., 2010). Courage, according to these positive psychologists, was seen as the warrior fortitude, often implying the use of willpower to choose between one's moral belief and physical sacrifice. Yang and her associates pointed out that personal willfulness is not to be mistaken as the existential concept of *the will to power* that is mostly concerned about our spiritual affirmation in the cosmos. . In fact, the "will to power" as a cosmic inner force that animates our existence provides the ground for us to speculate that courage is indeed a spiritual concept. Courage was again defined as "voluntarily facing personal risk in pursuit of a worthy goal." (Wong, 2017a). According to Wong, existential courage received very little attention throughout this text. Courage is an existential-spiritual construct and courage must be accompanied by faith concepts before we can conceive hope other positive psychology ideas such as hope.

The diagonal model presented earlier in this present chapter explains the psychological movement depicted by the arrows of the interrelated individual striving for human adaptation as well as evolution. The cooperation/ acceptance axis in this duality of human development was deeply connected to Spinoza's thoughts of ethics and the existential thoughts on striving and will to power. Spinoza called the striving toward self-preservation or self-affirmation itself "power" implying the *overcoming* of something that, at least potentially, threatens or denies the self. The courage to be is the "courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable." (Tillich,1952/2000, p. 20)

The concept of self-affirmation as courage gives the spiritual context to our striving and overcoming. The movement toward social interest in the diagonal model of human striving is powered by courage that coincides with Yalom's view of meaning and Tillich's statement that "The polarity of participation and individualization determines the special character of the courage to be…If both poles are accepted and transcended the relation to being itself has the character of faith." (Yang et al., 2010, p. 233). Existentially, courage is the *striving* power, a universal force of self-affirmation and will for more life *in spite of* the negating elements of our existence.

In Individual Psychology, spirituality is defined as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." (Mansager, 2003, p.65). Our striving does not stop at what is deemed as social adjustment. Better put, social adjustment is only a part of the result of our ultimate striving toward meaning of life or spiritual belonging. Courage, which brings all other human characters to life, has to be aligned with other spiritual attitudes for the attainment of the higher good.

VERSION 1

Courage is self-affirmation "in-spite-of" that is in spite of that which tends to prevent the self from affirming itself. Courage is the affirmation of one's being with the forward movement, which has in itself the character of "*in spite of*." The courage to accept one's uniqueness and the demands of nature *in spite of* what may be unacceptable can only be justified by *faith*. To have faith is to believe in what has yet to be accomplished and the courage to accept what is as it is. *Acceptance* is the developed capacity to fully embrace whatever is in the present moment. Tillich termed the courage of faith as the "acceptance of acceptance." The existential duality to participate and to let it be is deeply embedded in Individual Psychology in the "yes, *in spite of*" attitude with social interest. The courage to *hope* is manifested in our striving for a better future that brings not only change of our immediate living but also human progress. To hope is to live the goal of the future "*as if*" the future is realized in the present. [22] It is in our hope and faith that courage coincides emotionally with *joy*. Joy is a courageous "Yes" to our spiritual longing: the longing to be acknowledged, to have meaning, to belong, , to transform and to become whole (Yang, 2012).

Finally, the courage to *Agape love* is the ultimate answer to our quest for meaning when life seems to have endless suffering and short of love. Agape love is perfect love without fear and is human's deepest longing. Agape love and the agape attributes, when regarded as skills and attitudes, can be the facilitative factors of positive change (Savage & Nicholl, 2003; Watts, 1992, 2000). The courage to agape love is to *act as if* what we do, think and feel can change in ways that foster healing for self and others:

"Act as if it is a choice of constructive optimism.

Act as if what we fear will not happen.

Act as if change is possible, we grow.

Act as if the future is realized in the present, we have hope.

Acting as if a good life is attainable, our striving has meaning.

Act as if we are loved, we then can love." (Yang et al., 2010, p. 124-125).

Final Remarks

Victor Frankl was for a few years a member of Adler's circle, though they parted due to the divergence between his and Adler's views (Wong, 2017b, October 14). In his tribute to Adler, Fankl wrote:

 "I met Alfred Adler in 1924. How, then could I but love him as a person? And I worked

with him until 1927. How, then could I but admire him as a scientist? In Alfred Adler I

see the man who was the first creativity to oppose Sigmund Freud. What he, in so doing,

achieved and accomplished was no less than a Copernican Switch. No longer could man

be considered as the product, pawn and victim of drives and instincts; on the contrary,

drives and instincts from the material that serves man in expression and in action. Beyond

this, Alfred Adler may well be regarded as an existential thinker and as a forerunner of

the existential psychiatric movement." (Frankl, 1970)

I first met Paul in the 9th biannual meaning conference in 2016. We later collaborated on an open forum in Taiwan, 2017, on "Seeking Meaning in Suffering: A Dialogue of Frankl and Adler." I was very honored to serve as an invited speaker at the 10th meaning conference in 2018, on which this present paper is based. I wish to honor Dr. Paul Wong with this writing recognizing that it is his tireless contributions on EPP and his inclusiveness with meaning therapy that Frankl and Adler are conceptually reconciled again in their great and complimentary contributions to our understanding of courage.

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