

The Mystical Elements in Adler's Social Psychology

Christopher Eriksson, PhD
christophereriksson3@hotmail.com

[Go directly to the text of the paper](#)

Abstract

Alfred Adler's concept of social interest/social feeling (*gemeinschaftsgefühl*) and its deep structural parallels with the aims of mystical practice are examined in this paper, alongside Adler's view that effective therapists must cultivate artistic sensibility and mature self-knowledge. Living out this orientation in daily life is shown to correspond closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideal of the "genuine individual" and to function as a practical pathway toward both spiritual growth and creative psychotherapy. Empirical observations from facilitating Adlerian group programs designed to enhance reading, writing, and workplace-related skills in young neurodiverse adults suggest measurable improvements in social functioning, creativity, and courage. Drawing on perspectives from mysticism, poetry, and contemporary science, this paper argues that imperfection is not an obstacle to growth but a necessary condition for it. Accordingly, it proposes that the guiding attitude toward neurodiverse individuals should be neither corrective nor exceptionalizing, but grounded in the same humane, relational, and growth-oriented principles applicable to all persons—echoing Stephen Hawking's insight that without imperfection, none of us would exist.

Keywords: Adlerian psychology, neurodiverse, Rosicrucian, mysticism, psychotherapy, Stephen Hawking, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling

Les éléments mystiques dans la psychologie sociale d'Adler

Résumé

Cet article examine le concept d'intérêt social/sentiment social (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) d'Alfred Adler et ses parallèles structurels profonds avec les objectifs de la pratique mystique, ainsi que la conception d'Adler selon laquelle les thérapeutes efficaces doivent cultiver une sensibilité artistique et une connaissance de soi mûre. Il est démontré que la mise en pratique de cette orientation dans la vie quotidienne correspond étroitement à l'idéal de « l'individu authentique » de Ralph Waldo Emerson et qu'elle constitue une voie pratique vers la croissance spirituelle et la psychothérapie créative. Des observations empiriques issues de l'animation de programmes de groupe adlériens destinés à améliorer les compétences en lecture, en écriture et en milieu professionnel chez de jeunes adultes atteints de neurodiversité (troubles du spectre de l'autisme) suggèrent des améliorations mesurables du fonctionnement social, de la créativité et du courage. S'appuyant sur des perspectives issues du mysticisme, de la poésie et de la science contemporaine, l'article soutient que l'imperfection n'est pas un obstacle à la croissance, au contraire une condition nécessaire à celle-ci. En conséquence, il propose que l'attitude à adopter envers les personnes atteintes de neurodiversité ne soit ni corrective ni exceptionalist, mais

qu'elle repose sur les mêmes principes humains, relationnels et axés sur la croissance applicables à tous — faisant écho à la réflexion de Stephen Hawking selon laquelle, sans l'imperfection, aucun d'entre nous n'existerait.

Mots-clés : psychologie adlérienne, neurodiversité, rosicrucianisme, mysticisme, psychothérapie, Stephen Hawking, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling

Los Elementos Místicos en la Psicología Social de Adler

Resumen

En este artículo se examina el concepto de interés/sentimiento social (*gemeinschaftsgefühl*) de Alfred Adler y sus profundos paralelismos estructurales con los objetivos de la práctica mística, junto con su perspectiva de que los terapeutas eficaces deben cultivar la sensibilidad artística y un autoconocimiento maduro. Vivir esta orientación en la vida cotidiana corresponde estrechamente con el ideal de Ralph Waldo Emerson del "individuo genuino" y funcionar como una vía práctica tanto para el crecimiento espiritual como para la psicoterapia creativa. Las observaciones empíricas derivadas de la facilitación de programas grupales adlerianos diseñados para mejorar la lectura, la escritura y las habilidades laborales en jóvenes adultos con neurodiversidad sugieren mejoras mensurables en el funcionamiento social, la creatividad y la valentía. Basándose en perspectivas del misticismo, la poesía y la ciencia contemporánea, este artículo argumenta que la imperfección no es un obstáculo para el crecimiento, sino una condición necesaria para él. En consecuencia, propone que la actitud dirigente hacia las personas neurodiversas no debe ser correctiva ni excepcionalista, sino fundamentada en los mismos principios humanos, relacionales y de crecimiento aplicables a todas las personas, haciendo eco de la idea de Stephen Hawking de que sin imperfección, ninguno de nosotros existiría.

Palabras clave: psicología adleriana, neurodiverso, rosacruz, misticismo, psicoterapia, Stephen Hawking, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling

Os Elementos Místicos na Psicologia Social de Adler

Resumo

Este artigo examina o conceito de interesse social ou sentimento social (*gemeinschaftsgefühl*) de Alfred Adler e seus profundos paralelos estruturais com os objetivos da prática mística, paralelamente à visão de Adler de que terapeutas eficazes devem cultivar sensibilidade artística e um maduro autoconhecimento. Demonstra-se que vivenciar essa orientação na vida cotidiana corresponde estreitamente ao ideal de "indivíduo genuíno" de Ralph Waldo Emerson, funcionando como uma via prática tanto para o crescimento espiritual quanto para a psicoterapia criativa. Observações empíricas provenientes da facilitação de programas de grupos adlerianos—concebidos para aprimorar habilidades de leitura, escrita e competências profissionais em jovens adultos neurodivergentes—sugerem melhorias mensuráveis no funcionamento social, na criatividade e na coragem. Baseando-se em perspectivas da mística, da poesia e da ciência contemporânea, este trabalho argumenta que a imperfeição não é um obstáculo ao crescimento,

mas uma condição necessária para ele. Consequentemente, propõe-se que a atitude norteadora em relação a indivíduos neurodivergentes não deve ser corretiva nem excepcionalizante, mas fundamentada nos mesmos princípios humanitários, relacionais e orientados ao crescimento aplicáveis a todas as pessoas—ecoando a percepção de Stephen Hawking de que, sem a imperfeição, nenhum de nós existiria.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia adleriana, neurodiversidade, Rosacruz, misticismo, psicoterapia, Stephen Hawking, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling.

Die Sozialpsychologie von Alfred Adler und ihre mystischen Elemente

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit vergleicht das adlerianische Gemeinschaftsgefühl und dessen tiefen strukturellen Parallelen mit den Zielen der gelebten Mystik. Sie untersucht Adlers Vorstellung, dass erfolgreiche Therapeuten sowohl Reife und Selbsterkenntnis als auch ein Gefühl für Kunst entwickeln sollen. Hier wird gezeigt, dass das Ausleben dieser Ausrichtung im täglichen Leben mit dem Ideal des „wahren Individuums“ von Ralph Waldo Emerson übereinstimmt und einen praktischen Weg sowohl zum spirituellen Wachstum als auch zur kreativen Psychotherapie darstellt. Die empirischen Observationen der vereinfachten adlerianische Gruppenprogrammen, die entworfen sind um das Lesen, Schreiben sowie die Arbeitsplatzaufgaben bei jungen neurodiversen Erwachsenen zu fördern, zeigen messbare Fortschritte im sozialen Verhalten, Kreativität und Mut. Bezugnehmend auf die Erkenntnisse der Mystik, der Dichtkunst und der heutigen Wissenschaft, argumentiert diese Abhandlung, dass Unvollkommenheit kein Hindernis zum Wachstum darstellt, vielmehr sei sie eine notwendige Bedingung dazu. In diesem Sinne wird hier vorgeschlagen, dass die neurodiversen Personen weder korrektiv noch als Ausnahmen behandelt werden sollen. Man soll sie mit den Mensch-, Beziehungs- und Wachstumsorientierten Prinzipien, die für alle Menschen gültig sind, im Einklang bringen – in Anlehnung an Stephen Hawkings Erkenntnis, dass kein Mensch vollkommen ist.

Schlüsselworte: Adlers Psychologie, Neurodiversität, Rosenkreuzer, Mystik, Psychotherapie, Stephen Hawking, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling

An Introduction to Adlerian Psychology

Just as striving toward success and overcoming challenges is the master motive in Alfred Adler's (1870 – 1937) subjective, social, and creative psychology of use, social interest/social feeling (*gemeinschaftsgefühl* in German) is the cardinal personality trait and Adler's criterion for mental health, reflecting the relationship of individuals to their environment. Adler placed this feeling of belonging above nearly all desirable traits of character and linked its absence to nearly all undesirable traits (Adler 1964, 200n; Ansbacher 1968, 143).

[P]atient[s] must be guided away from [themselves] towards productivity for others....
All my efforts are devoted towards increasing the social interest of ... patient[s]. I know that the real reason for the malady is patient[s'] lack of cooperation, and I want [them] to

see it too. As soon as they can connect with their fellow[persons] on an equal footing, they are cured. (143)

According to Adler, a developed social interest generates an ability to identify with others to feel part of the whole, to be at home on this earth, and to see the situation as others see it. This then leads to a way of acting and behaving which is designated as reasonable and is equated with common sense since it advances the community (Ansbacher 1968, 142; Adler 1979, 43).

One example Adler gave of this concept of *gemeinschaftsgefühl* is “[t]o see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, and to feel with the heart of another” (1964, 135). But *gemeinschaftsgefühl* for Adler is more than a feeling of empathy. It is a positive, evaluative, understanding attitude toward the whole of life, innate in its potentiality but which has to be consciously developed by the individual (Adler 1964, 134). It has been associated with “[m]aintaining an affirmative, optimistic understanding and loving attitude to life and self so as to gain a sense of harmony and kinship with a friendly universe and therefore also a loving interest in the interests of others” (Eriksson 1992, 277).

On a practical level, it signifies how much we will take into account the welfare and interests of others as we strive to succeed in our own lives. A developing social interest thus gives rise to the role of the scientist who seeks to understand more of nature’s laws; to the entrepreneur or engineer who searches for practical ways to make knowledge available to others and so benefit society at large; and to the artist and musician who work to convey some aspect of life as they are moved to express it.

For Adler (1964, 155), an increase in social feeling in an individual functions like a regeneration, an illumination that leaves little untouched. It is transformative and capable of radically changing how we see ourselves (Bluvshstein 2021, 413-415). Adler writes:

The mind improves for intelligence is a communal function; the feeling of worth and value is heightened giving courage and a more optimistic view; it fosters a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset; it favours devotion to one’s work, objectivity, logic, and a readiness to take on responsibility; the individual feels at home in life and feels his [their] existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is [they are] useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private feelings of inferiority. (1964, 155)

Adler associated this trait with striving for a sense of community as though humankind had reached the goal of perfection. As such, it is linked to courage, resolve, persistence, and independent thinking (Ansbacher 1968, 146).

Like our body parts and organs that are designed to work together for the common good of the whole body, Adler sees human nature and nature more broadly related as in a greater whole. Using an analogy from cellular biology, Adler writes about *gemeinschaftsgefühl* as though it were a pluripotential cell, “in its rich differentiations to parental love, love of family, sexual love, love of one’s country, love of nature, art, science, and love of humankind” (Ansbacher 1968, 133; Clark 2016). Hence, all forms of love are effectively seen by Adler as specific outcomes of

this feeling of harmony or cohesion with the universe, cast into movement by the individual's creative power to the goal desired.

Lewis Way (Way 1966; Ansbacher 1968, 135) linked this feeling of belonging to the work of mystics and the master composers whose musical compositions engender the same feelings of oneness in others as the composer had. Like Adler, Way saw this feeling of oneness giving rise to sexual love and other forms of affection:

We sometimes see examples of this sense of kinship with all that exists in the work of great artists, like that of Beethoven, in the recognition of oneness, and in love, sympathy, and desire for combination with life which music such as his so often expresses. In a narrower form, the same emotion can also be felt sexually towards another human being, especially when that being comes to symbolize the whole sex, so that in the love for one is expressed the love for all. It is difficult to believe that the feeling of natural sympathy for life which is apparent in the work of great artists and mystics is not a more comprehensive form of the same feeling as expressed by the lover. (Ansbacher 1968, 135)

That there is a greater whole in the universe and that everything fits together is part of Adler's meaning of *gemeinschaftsgefühl*: "The innate feeling is actually a cosmic feeling, a reflection of the coherence of everything cosmic, which lives in us, which we cannot dismiss entirely, and which gives us the ability to empathize with things which lie outside our body" (Ansbacher 1968, 134).

Adler and Mysticism

Mysticism can be philosophically defined broadly speaking as "a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation" (Jones and Gellman 2025). Mystical experiences have a range of effects, but notably "mystical experiences break the sense of a narrow 'self' and make one feel connected to others and the rest of the world" (Jones and Gellman 2025). As such, a mystic seeks direct experience and intuitive knowledge of the Divine through such practices as meditation but also through experiential interactions with others which include developing a sense of social feeling. As a mystical organization, the Rosicrucian Order AMORC places emphasis on "fraternity" as a guiding concept—a broad sense of commonality and kinship with all life as well as with all of humanity.

The practical importance of living up to Adler's concept of social interest/social feeling as a tool for spiritual growth is attested to by ancient as well as modern philosophers and poets. Leonardo da Vinci appears to have had a similar thought five hundred years ago and before holography was invented: "Who would believe that so small a space could contain the images of the whole universe" (Gelb 2004, 96).

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 82) is another, in addition to organizations like the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, whose stated purpose is to help evolve the consciousness of humankind (Lewis 1986).

Emerson has been called a mystical thinker rather than a philosopher for several reasons (Kazin and Aaron 1958, 8). He insisted on a personal religion and on each person's ability to sustain a wholly individual relation to the Divine to the profound irritation of the traditionalists. Second, he was a writer who actually lived his ideas. Emerson recognized the importance of thinking good thoughts and, like Adler, wrote that the key to individuals' lives is their particular thinking (Adler 1964). Emerson writes: "The key to every man [person] is his [their] thought. Sturdy and defying though he [they] look, he has [they have] a helm which he obeys [they obey], which is the idea after which all his [their] facts are classified. He [They] can only be reformed by showing him [them] a new idea which commands his [their] own" (Atkinson 1950, 280).

Emerson exalted persons who could find their own centre, and with perfect equanimity, could rest on Self and act from the promptings of the Inner Self; autonomous people who have ventured to trust themselves for a taskmaster (Paul 1967, viii). Likewise, Laura Dassow Walls (2021) discusses Emerson's concept of the "World Soul in American Transcendentalism" by describing that Emerson felt that all humans and perhaps all life "share an inner divine principle that radiates meaning into the world" (290). Furthermore, Joel Gladd (2026) in a publication from the College of Western Idaho suggests that Emerson should not be categorized as just a pantheist, but rather more of a "mystic" in his approach to human nature.

Emerson gave the following marks of the "genuine individual," that which in his own life he always endeavoured to emulate:

1. The individual believes in oneself.
2. The individual speaks the truth, i.e., that which is universally true.
3. The individual thinks the truth.
4. The individual acts the truth.
5. The individual is characterized by grandeur of character and its identity with a spiritually inspired life.

Emerson added the last point to make it clear to the reader that he was not describing arrogant egotism (Paul 1967, viii).

Emerson's genuine individual, self-reliant and with the character of an inspired mystic, is motivated by growth like individuals with high social interest. They empathize, are courageous, have a sense of belonging and a feeling of wonderment and harmony with all of life. They are tolerant, reasonable, and full of common sense, and can think and reason unencumbered by previous conditioning. Like present-day Rosicrucians, Emerson believed that there is one soul force that animates every individual in the world and described its actions (Atkinson 1950, xxi). Emerson had a strong interest in the interests of humankind. He describes how each of the major activities of humanity is related to this one Soul, and states that society is actually the finding of this Soul by individuals in each other. Adler's sense of community and feeling of kinship with a

friendly universe and all that it contains translates for Emerson as individuals joyfully finding their Soul (the one Soul) in each other. Whereas Adler, the physician, emphasized the importance of cultivating social interest for good health and the avoidance of neuroses and other mental health problems, Emerson seems to have prescribed it like modern-day Rosicrucians as food for spiritual or mystical attunement.

In the Rosicrucian Western Tradition of mysticism, the student simply has to attune with the higher octaves of consciousness or life. In this ontology, it is the continued thoughts and practice of love, kindness, understanding, and tolerance that reflect an attunement or harmony with the higher octaves of consciousness (Lewis 1967, 172). However, these are the characteristics that have been found in the individual with high social interest who is motivated by the desire to grow as a human being (Adler 1964; Lewis 1967, 16).

A definite degree of social feeling is clearly required to willfully and successfully begin to evolve one's own consciousness, as the student of mysticism aims to do. Moreover, it implies that the continued practice and living of thoughts of love, kindness, understanding, and tolerance actively contribute to the development and enhancement of this sense of kinship and harmony with life, humankind, and the whole universe. As has been seen, increasing degrees of Adler's social feeling contribute to the remaking of character that is found in an individual who is journeying on the mystical path (Underhill 1960, 31; Lewis 1967, 172).

The following exercise given in Harmony Seminars that have been sponsored by the Rosicrucian Order AMORC may be said to be used to foster and increase this sense of social feeling and sense of having one's place in life (Eriksson 1992):

If I bring to mind a situation in which some difficulty has been encountered, associated feelings of refusal or rigidity or anger will likely be experienced. A Rosicrucian is enjoined when doing this to willfully shift awareness to thoughts of acceptance, cooperation, and goodwill towards this person; in other words, to try to see the other person's point of view and accept that this person has the same rights to be him or herself with his or her thoughts that I claim for myself.

If this understanding is carried out successfully, individuals notice that their feelings and emotional reactions will have changed from rigidity or anger toward love and understanding.

In the Rosicrucian teachings, such a shift in feeling reflects a successful attunement with the higher octaves of Life, with love, tolerance, and understanding, which, because they are higher, are also more inclusive. This attunement or harmony with the finer things of life then permits a broader view of life and Self and constitutes progress and another step toward the realization of the fullness of Being. In Rosicrucian ontology, such ideals striven after are seen as magnetizing individuals so as to pull to them the circumstances and experiences, mastery of which will move them toward the realization of their ideals. This includes discharging any karmic debt that one has incurred under the universal law of compensation for human behaviour (Lewis 1954, 107-123).

Adler's concept of "social interest/social feeling" has accordingly been linked to the great scientists' and artists' own descriptions of their moments of originality (Eriksson 2017). Creative originality is then to be understood as social interest/social feeling, that is their psychosocial well-being focused clearly by their goal-oriented creative power to increase their understanding or portrayal of something that passionately interests them. Ansbacher (1968, 135) quotes Way:

Adler used the word *gemeinschaftsgefühl* because his meaning embraced not only the society of [humanity], but an attitude of identification with the whole created universe. The "community," as he seems to have envisaged it, included love of nature as well as love of our fellowmen [women], and even love of the inanimate. It was the sense of kinship with the other animals and the basis of our sense of beauty, of the earth and the sea and the sky. I would therefore be inclined to translate this difficult word as "sense of community" – of community with the Universe, which is to be regarded as essentially "friendly." (Way 1966, 135)

Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936), the renowned English poet, journalist and short-story writer, clearly understood this sense of community while retaining one's independence as illustrated in his famous poem "If" (1910, 2020): "If you can trust yourself when all [persons] doubt you,/ But make allowance for their doubting too..."

Writing confidently with a strong sense of feeling at home in this world and with a love of nature, Kipling used his own creative imagination and artistic talent to vividly illustrate and animate our human kinship with other animals in *The Jungle Book* (1894). This timeless and ever-popular classic book that has been made into movies for children epitomizes the bonds between humans and nature. Kipling surely drew on his own struggles to be his best self when he created the character of Mowgli, the man-cub raised by wolves, since Kipling himself was sent away from home in India at age five to be fostered in England, a place that he described as a "House of Desolation" (poetryfoundation.org 2026).

A quotation from an interview with Rudyard Kipling by author Arthur Gordon (1967) illustrates the mystic's struggle to be self-reliant: "The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. To be your own [person] is a hard business. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning oneself." Emerson too understood this concept in his American Transcendentalist essay "Self-Reliance" (1841, 2022).

This idea also brings to mind Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809 – 92) lines in his poem "Ulysses" (1842) originally written in 1833 after the transition of his close friend Arthur Henry Hallam (1811 – 1833) that speak to this search for the better self and our human connectedness: "I am part of all that I have met" and "[t]o strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (Tennyson 2008).

Adler's High Art

Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519), the famous Renaissance artist, engineer, scientist, and inventor, is recognized as one of the most creative individuals of all time. He is likely best known in the general public's mind for his paintings of the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. He demonstrated to the world the importance of artistic ability in creating scientific knowledge: "The artist sees what others only catch a glimpse of; learns how to see, realizes that everything connects to everything else" (Gelb 2004, 96).

Adler was of the same opinion, seeing artists and poets as the leaders on the path to discovering universal truths. It was reading Shakespeare, Goethe, the Bible, and various fables that most inspired Adler to develop the principles of Individual Psychology as a psychology of use, or "acting as if" (Adler 1964, 329). Accordingly, Adler recommended that therapists should be striving to gain some very definite abilities for their job at hand: "To be a therapist, artistic ability is required, which cannot be achieved without mature self-understanding, ready wit, the ability to convince, being convinced oneself, and a sufficient ability to guess, to identify, and to co-operate" (Holub 1935, 87).

Holub added: "These are high requirements. But I believe that rather than to be frightened by them, it is better to consider them as part of an endless task whose solution we never reach, but which we can, however, gradually approach" (87).

These are indeed high requirements to be a therapist. This ongoing life task advocated by Adler bears similarity to the lofty goals and discipline of the mystic, traditionally promoted as "Know Thyself":

Mysticism is that discipline which makes it possible for us to reach and understand the source of knowledge that lies beyond the limits of the material universe. This potential ability supersedes a source of knowledge limited to the five physical senses and the material world of which our body is composed. This ultimate source of all knowledge is accessible to the human being who turns his [their] thoughts within himself [themselves] and establishes a harmonious relationship with that inner being within. (Poole 2015)

With this ongoing psychological movement in themselves as they strive to acquire significant artistic skills and mature self-knowledge, Adler considered that therapists would be well equipped to help their clients.

In my 2019 paper, "Adlerian Group Interventions on Workplace Behavior," I explained how this concept can be put into practical terms, suggesting that when therapists honestly and humbly join with discouraged or overwhelmed special needs clients as equals, when they are psychologically present with them non-judgmentally in each moment, when they share with them their own weaknesses and imperfections and what they have found hard, and at the same time let them know that they are striving to know and improve themselves and gain artistic skills, their clients will naturally be stimulated to experience this upward striving through their own eyes, to see themselves anew and more objectively.

A mystical perspective that relates to this idea is described in the article “A Triangle of Love,” in the *Rosicrucian Digest* by Tom Ogazon (2016). Its overall theme is summarized in the following text and diagram.

When we detach from our ego, which likes to judge and control our attention, and instead actively strive to develop compassion for ourselves and others, through cultivating good kind thoughts and applying the golden rule, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” we will naturally open up a relationship with the higher octaves of consciousness; that is with the love and peace of the Inner Self, the Master Within, the God of our Heart. This idea is portrayed below in the article’s triangle of love. See Figure 1.

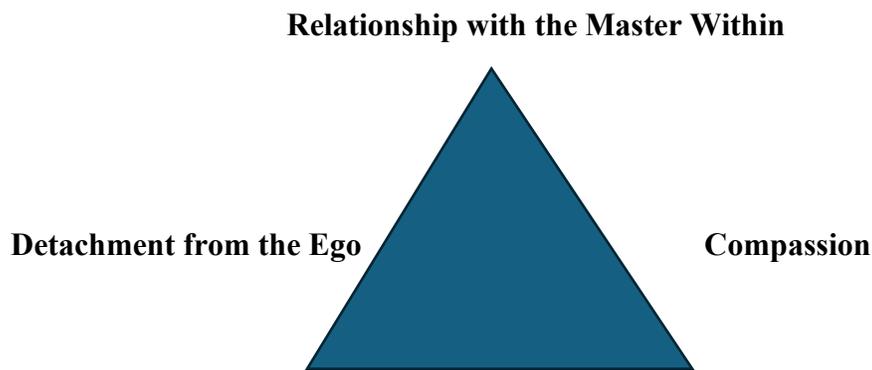


Figure 1. *Rosicrucian Digest*, 2016, 94 (2), p. 14.

Adler, the physician and therapist, knew that through human connectedness and resonance, clients in therapy would become aware of this radiating peace and love and be moved by its experience.

As former Emperor H. Spencer Lewis wrote:

Even those who are not interested in metaphysical laws discover that certain definite results manifest when they apply certain principles. This should make plain that the Rosicrucian teachings deal with the development and application of the faculties and functionings of the inner self and are based on scientific principles. They are easily demonstrated and are used effectively for furthering one’s best interests and for overcoming unfortunate conditions. (Lewis 2016)

Applying Adler’s Mystical Approach to Neurodiverse Adults

In 2019, I argued in a paper that this human resonance and connectedness was seen when facilitating a group of neurodiverse young adults on workplace best practices. This included those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with related comorbidities. It was helped along by the fact that the objective focus of the group on “workplace best practices” proved a positive and common objective for all the participants, so

helping to forestall any individual resistance. The Adlerian group approach allowed the autistic and ADHD students an opportunity to take control and lead, which modelled cooperation and further reduced resistance (Hartshorne and Herr 1983). It generated synergy and a teamwork approach to the course goals, and through interaction and discussion, to courage and a greater sense of belonging with new possibilities.

The same positive response has also been reported in a recent Adlerian educational program to enhance the reading and writing skills of a group of intellectually able neurodiverse young adults (Eriksson 2025). The improvement seen in these Adlerian group programs is not surprising since a lack of social interest/social feeling was confirmed in a study of young children diagnosed with ADHD (Alizadeh et al. 2016). Walton (2016; Eriksson 2017, 254) reported that the two most common premises found in the belief system of the ADHD child are:

- People are in this world to be concerned about me, not for me to be concerned about them.
- Adults will control your life if you give them the opportunity. You can bet they are not going to control me.

These ego-centric attitudes illustrate how these ADHD children creatively manage their environment as they perceive it, while growing up as a young child in their respective families. Mystically speaking, it is important to recognize that the Adlerian approach to education enhances the social connectivity that is so necessary for self-transformation and for ego-detachment as illustrated in Figure 1.

In a 2013 article titled “Catatonia in Autism,” Lee Elizabeth Wachtel acknowledged that catatonic symptoms do indeed wreak havoc. But this physician ended her paper with a quote from a French nobleman and philosopher, Nicolas de Condorcet, to show that catatonia in autism is readily diagnosable and treatable. Her take-home message is that we would all be better served by knowing less about what’s impossible: “*Nous ferions davantage de choses si nous en savions moins d'impossible.*” (“We would do more if we knew less about what’s impossible”). That is, when treating neurodiverse individuals, a mystical approach allows for greater creativity in applying compassion in treatment.

Theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) would surely have appreciated Wachtel’s comment. He suffered from motor neuron disease most of his adult life which paralyzed him, yet he is recognized as one of the most important theoretical physicists since Albert Einstein (1879-1955). Despite the severe limits imposed by his physical condition, he used his developed social interest/social feeling, i.e., his psychosocial well-being, to create original theories on black holes and general cosmology. Like his physical body, he observed that the physical universe is not perfect: “One of the basic rules of the universe is that nothing is perfect. Perfection simply doesn’t exist. Without imperfection, neither you nor I would exist, and however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. It matters that you don’t just give up” (Hawking 2018). Hawking’s courage and persistence again bring to mind Poet-Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson’s words in his poem *Ulysses*: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (Tennyson 2008).

Finally, we can appreciate that the Adlerian mystical emphasis on social connectivity aims at developing inner strength, ego-detachment, and humility so necessary to self-transformation.

Conclusion

Living up to Adler's concept of social interest/social feeling in everyday life encompasses Ralph Waldo Emerson's vision of the "genuine individual"—a person motivated by growth, guided by inner conviction, and attuned to the larger whole of life. This orientation also parallels the aims of Rosicrucian and other mystical traditions, in which students ascend the mystic path through self-knowledge, compassion, and an expanding sense of kinship with humanity and the universe. That Adler articulated this process so clearly attests to the depth and vitality of his own quickened consciousness.

Creative originality, as illustrated by figures such as Stephen Hawking, should be recognized as equally available to the young neurodiverse adults discussed here. Individuals with special needs are not exceptions to nature, but expressions of nature's universal laws, including growth through imperfection, struggle, and compensation. From both an Adlerian and a mystical perspective, difference is not deficit but potential shaped by context, encouragement, and purpose.

Consequently, the most constructive guiding attitude toward neurodiverse individuals is the same one appropriate for all human beings: an attitude grounded in respect, shared humanity, and faith in creative possibility. As both mystics and scientists remind us, it is often our assumptions about limitation—not limitation itself—that constrain development. As Dr. Lee Elizabeth Wachtel wrote, echoing a timeless wisdom: "We would do more if we knew less about what is impossible."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Bibliography

- Adler, Alfred. 1964. *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler: A Systematic Presentation in Selections from His Writings*. Edited by Heinz L. Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher. New York: Harper Torchbooks. Originally published 1956.
- Adler, Alfred. 1979. *Superiority and Social Interest*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Alizadeh, Hamid, F. X. Walton, and Fariba Soheili. 2016. "Social Interest in Children with and without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 72: 290–307.
- Ansbacher, Heinz L. 1968. "The Concept of Social Interest." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 24: 131–149.
- Atkinson, Brooks. 1950. Introduction to *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays*. New York: Random House.

- Bluvshtein, Marina, Sahar Saeedi, Nathan DeBruyn, and Kyle Gillespie. 2021. "Mindfulness, Therapeutic Metaphors, and Brain Functioning in Adlerian Therapy: *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* at Work." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 77 (4): 409–426.
- Bohm, David. 2004. *On Creativity*. London: Routledge.
- Clark, Arthur J. 2016. "Empathy and Alfred Adler: An Integral Perspective." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 72 (4): 237–253. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2016.0020>.
- Cox, Amy, and Eva Dreikurs Ferguson. 2016. "Corporate Style of Life: An Adlerian Conceptualization Told in a Personal Account." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 72 (4): 333–340.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. 2022. "Self-Reliance." Gutenberg eBook of Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Edna H. L. Turpin. Originally published 1841. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16643/16643-h/16643-h.htm>.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 1992. "Social Interest/Social Feeling and the Evolution of Consciousness." *Individual Psychology* 48 (3): 277–287.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 2017. "Adlerian Psychology and Music Therapy: The Harmony of Sound and Matter and Community Feeling." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 73 (3): 243–263.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 2018. "Adlerian Group Interventions on Workplace Best Practices: Improves Attitudes and Behavior in Young Adults with Neurodevelopmental Disorders." Paper presented at the International Association for Counselling Conference, Rome.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 2019. "Adlerian Group Interventions on Workplace Behavior." In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 2022. "Music as Social Harmonizer: A Tribute to Adlerian Rudolf Dreikurs." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 78 (3): 373–376.
- Eriksson, Christopher. 2025. "Adlerian Group Programs and Neurodiverse Young Adults." *NASAP News*, May. <https://www.nasap.news/may-2025-1>.
- Gelb, Michael J. 2004. *How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Bantam Dell.
- Gladd, Joel. 2026. "Ralph Waldo Emerson and American Transcendentalism" in *Anthology of Earlier American Literature: College of Western Idaho*. Pressbooks. <https://cwi.pressbooks.pub/americanliterature/chapter/ralph-waldo-emerson-and-american-transcendentalism/>.
- Gordon, Arthur. 1967. "Six Hours with Rudyard Kipling" *The Kipling Journal* XXXIV (162), 5-8. <https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/pdf/KJ162.pdf>.
- Greene, Brian. 2015. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gubser, Stephan. 2010. *The Little Book of String Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hamm, J. S., Jon Carlson, and Basak Erguner-Tekinalp. 2016. "Adlerian-Based Positive Group Counseling Interventions with Emotionally Troubled Youth." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 72: 254–272.
- Hartshorne, T. S., and M. D. Herr. 1983. "An Adlerian Approach to Autism." *Individual Psychology: Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research, and Practice* 39 (4): 394–401.
- Hawking, Stephen. 2018. *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Holub, Max. 1935. "Infantile Inferiority Feelings." *International Journal of Individual Psychology* 1: 76–87.

- Jones, Richard and Jerome Gellman. 2025. "Mysticism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2025/entries/mysticism/>.
- Kazin, Alfred, and Sidney Aaron. 1958. *Emerson: A Modern Anthology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kipling, Rudyard. 2026. Biography. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/rudyard-kipling>.
- Kipling, Rudyard. 2020. "If." *Rewards and Fairies*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. Originally published 1910. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46473/if--->.
- Kipling, Rudyard. 1894. *The Jungle Book*. United Kingdom: Macmillan.
- Lewis, H. Spencer. 1954. *Mansions of the Soul: The Cosmic Conception*. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC.
- Lewis, H. Spencer. 2015. *Essays of a Modern Mystic*. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC. Originally published 1962.
- Lewis, H. Spencer. 2016. "How Thoughts Project." *Rosicrucian Digest* 94 (2), 22. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC. <https://www.rosicrucian.org/rosicrucian-digest-applying-rosicrucian-principles>.
- Lewis, Ralph M. 1986. "What Is Mysticism?" *Rosicrucian Digest* 64 (1), 4-6. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC. https://b45e1c3778bbf3ebb96c-637cca54df3fd347e9c3d5d35c2f839a.ssl.cf5.rackcdn.com/Rosicrucian_Digest_v64_n1_1986_OCR.pdf.
- Nicoll, William G. 2015. *Developing Social-Emotional and Behavioral Well-Being in Youth: School, Family, and Community Applications*. Paper presented at the International Adlerian Professional Development Summer Seminar, University of Malta.
- Ogazon, Tom. 2016. "A Triangle of Love." *Rosicrucian Digest* 94 (2), 11-15. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC. <https://www.rosicrucian.org/rosicrucian-digest-applying-rosicrucian-principles>.
- Paul, Sherman. 1967. Introduction to *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*. New York: Library of America.
- Poole, Cecil A. 2015. *Mysticism: The Ultimate Experience*. San Jose, CA: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC. Originally published 1982.
- Shulman, Bernard H. 1981. *Contributions to Individual Psychology: Selected Papers*. Chicago: Alfred Adler Institute of Chicago.
- Sonstegard, Manford. 1998. "The Theory and Practice of Adlerian Group Counseling and Psychotherapy." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 54: 217–250.
- Sonuga-Barke, Edmund J. S., et al. 2001. "Parent-Based Therapies for Preschool Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder." *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 40 (4): 402–408.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. 2008. "Ulysses." *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*. Edited by K. Hodder. Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions. Originally published in *Poems* 1842. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45392/ulysses>.
- Wachtel, Lee Elizabeth. 2013. "Catatonia in Autism." Paper presented at the Interagency Autism Coordination Meeting, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, July 9.
- Walls, Laura Dassow. 2021. "The World Soul in American Transcendentalism" in James Wilberding Ed. *World Soul: A History* (New York, 2021; online edition Oxford

- Academic, 23 Sept.
2021). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190913441.003.0015>, accessed 6 Jan. 2026.
- Walton, F. X. 2016. "Some Contributions of Adlerian Psychology to Society." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 72 (2): 148–158.
- Way, Lewis. 1950. *Adler's Place in Psychology*. New York: Macmillan.
- Way, Lewis. 1966. "Again 'Gemeinschaftsgefühl.'" *Individual Psychology Newsletter* 16: 31.
- Woolfson, Michael M. 2015. *Resonance in Physical Science*. London: Imperial College Press.
- Wordsworth, William. 2008. *The Major Works*. Edited by Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press.