US psychoanalyst

He was born in Budapest, Hungary, where his father was professor of philosophy, and received his MD from Budapest University. During World War I he was a medical officer, after which he studied and then worked at the Institute for Psychoanalysis in Berlin. He settled permanently in the USA in 1932, where he founded the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. Although he wrote widely on psychoanalytic and cultural issues, his work on psychosomatic disorders, among which he included peptic ulcer, essential hypertension and rheumatic arthritis, was especially influential.

Hungarian-born psychoanalyst who directed the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis for twenty-four years. His chief contributions were in psychosomatics and brief analysis. He was the first graduate of the Berlin Institute, analysed by Sachs and one of the prominent members of the second-generation psychoanalysts. In 1929 Freud invited him to Vienna, but Alexander left for the University of Chicago where he was nominated Professor of Psychiatry. Every summer, though, he visited Freud, who considered him as ‘his best pupil in the United States’.

Alexander may be considered the founder of psychological medicine. In the area of brief analysis, he anticipated important ideas (such as the concept of ‘corrective emotional experience’) considered unorthodox by the psychoanalytic establishment of the time. He became leader of the ‘Chicago school of psychoanalysis’, characterised by an emphasis on emotional relationship rather than intellectual insight as the main curative factor. It might be no coincidence that, a generation later, Kohut came from the Chicago Institute. Also Ferenczi, the Budapest School’s leader, emphasised the importance of emotional relationship, and that is why the Chicago school is considered linked by a fil rouge to the Hungarian school, its ideal prosecution.

One of the most outspoken critics of Alexander’s technique was Eissler.

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