

THE SECOND NIGHT:

*All Problems Are Interpersonal
Relationship Problems*

The young man was as good as his word. Exactly one week later, he returned to the philosopher's study. Truth be told, he'd felt the urge to rush back there only two or three days after his first visit. He had turned things over in his mind very carefully, and his doubts had turned to certainty. In short, teleology, the attributing of the purpose of a given phenomenon, rather than its cause, was a sophistry, and the existence of trauma was beyond question. *People cannot simply forget the past, and neither can they become free from it.*

Today, the young man decided, he'd thoroughly dismantle this eccentric philosopher's theories and settle matters once and for all.

Why You Dislike Yourself

YOUTH: So after last time, I calmed myself down, focused, and thought things over. And yet, I've got to say, I still can't agree with your theories.

PHILOSOPHER: Oh? What do you find questionable about them?

YOUTH: Well, for instance, the other day I admitted that I dislike myself. No matter what I do, I can't find anything but shortcomings, and I can see no reason why I'd start liking myself. But of course I still want to. You explain everything as having to do with goals, but what kind of goal could I have here? I mean, what kind of advantage could there be in my not liking myself? I can't imagine there'd be a single thing to gain from it.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. You feel that you don't have any strong points, that you've got nothing but shortcomings. Whatever the facts might be, that's how you feel. In other words, your self-esteem is extremely low. So the questions here, then, are why do you feel so wretched? And, why do you view yourself with such low esteem?

YOUTH: Because that's a fact—I really don't have any strong points.

PHILOSOPHER: You're wrong. You notice only your shortcomings because you've resolved to not start liking yourself. In order to not like yourself, you don't see your strong points and focus only on your shortcomings. First, understand this point.

YOUTH: I have resolved to not start liking myself?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. To you, not liking yourself is a virtue.

YOUTH: Why? What for?

PHILOSOPHER: Perhaps this is something you should think about yourself. What sort of shortcomings do you think you have?

YOUTH: I'm sure you have already noticed. First of all, there's my personality. I don't have any self-confidence, and I'm always pessimistic about everything. And I guess I'm too self-conscious, because I worry about what other people see, and then, I live with a constant distrust of other people. I can never act naturally; there's always something theatrical about what I say and do. And it's not just my personality—there's nothing to like about my face or my body, either.

PHILOSOPHER: When you go about listing your shortcomings like that, what kind of mood does it put you in?

YOUTH: Wow, that's nasty! An unpleasant mood, naturally. I'm sure that no one would want to get involved with a guy as warped as me. If there were anyone this wretched and bothersome in my vicinity, I'd keep my distance, too.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. Well, that settles it, then.

YOUTH: What do you mean?

PHILOSOPHER: It might be hard to understand from your own example, so I'll use another. I use this study for simple counseling sessions. It must have been quite a few years ago, but there was a female student who came by. She sat right where you are sitting now, in the same chair. Well, her concern was her fear of blushing. She told me that she was always turning red whenever she was out in public, and that she would do anything to rid herself of this. So I asked her, "Well, if you *can* cure it, what will you want to do then?" And she said that there was a man she wanted. She secretly had feelings for him but wasn't ready to divulge them. Once her fear of blushing was cured, she'd confess her desire to be with him.

YOUTH: Huh! All right, it sounds like the typical thing a female student would seek counseling for. In order for her to confess her feelings for him, first she had to cure her blushing problem.

PHILOSOPHER: But is that really the whole case? I have a different opinion. Why did she get this fear of blushing? And why hadn't it gotten better? Because she needed that symptom of blushing.

YOUTH: What are you saying exactly? She was asking you to cure it, wasn't she?

PHILOSOPHER: What do you think was the scariest thing to her, the thing she wanted to avoid most of all? It was that the man would reject her, of course. The fact that her unrequited love would negate everything for her, the very existence and possibility of "I." This aspect is deeply present in adolescent unrequited love. But as long as she has a fear of blushing, she can go on thinking, *I can't be with him because I have this fear of blushing*. It could end without her ever working up the courage to confess her feelings to him, and she could convince herself that he would reject her anyway. And finally, she can live in the possibility that *If only my fear of blushing had gotten better, I could have . . .*

YOUTH: Okay, so she fabricated that fear of blushing as an excuse for her own inability to confess her feelings. Or maybe as a kind of insurance for when he rejected her.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you could put it that way.

YOUTH: Okay, that *is* an interesting interpretation. But if that were really the case, wouldn't it be impossible to do anything to help her? Since she simultaneously needs that fear of blushing and is suffering because of it, there'd be no end to her troubles.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, this is what I told her: "Fear of blushing is easy to cure." She asked, "Really?" I went on: "But I will not cure it." She pressed me "Why?" I explained, "Look, it's thanks to your fear of blushing that you can accept your

dissatisfaction with yourself and the world around you, and with a life that isn't going well. It's thanks to your fear of blushing, and it's caused by it." She asked, "How could it be . . . ?" I went on: "If I did cure it, and nothing in your situation changed at all, what would you do? You'd probably come here again and say, 'Give me back my fear of blushing.' And that would be beyond my abilities."

YOUTH: Hmm.

PHILOSOPHER: Her story certainly isn't unusual. Students preparing for their exams think, *If I pass, life will be rosy*. Company workers think, *If I get transferred, everything will go well*. But even when those wishes are fulfilled, in many cases nothing about their situations changes at all.

YOUTH: Indeed.

PHILOSOPHER: When a client shows up requesting a cure from fear of blushing, the counselor must not cure the symptoms. Then recovery is likely to be even more difficult. That is the Adlerian psychology way of thinking about this kind of thing.

YOUTH: So what specifically do you do, then? Do you ask what they're worried about and then just leave it be?

PHILOSOPHER: She didn't have confidence in herself. She was very afraid that things being what they were, he'd reject her even if she did confess to him. And if that happened, she'd lose even more confidence and get hurt. That's why she created the symptom of the fear of blushing. What I can do is to get the person first to accept "myself now," and then regardless of the outcome have the courage to step forward. In Adlerian psychology, this kind of approach is called "encouragement."

YOUTH: Encouragement?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. I'll explain systematically what it consists of once our discussion has progressed a little further. We're not at that stage yet.

YOUTH: That works for me. In the meantime, I'll keep the word "encouragement" in mind. So whatever happened to her?

PHILOSOPHER: Apparently, she had the chance to join a group of friends and spend time with the man, and in the end it was he who confessed his desire to be with her. Of course, she never dropped by this study again after that. I don't know what became of her fear of blushing. But she probably didn't need it any longer.

YOUTH: Yes, she clearly didn't have any use for it anymore.

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. Now, keeping this student's story in mind, let's think about your problems. You say that, at present, you notice only your shortcomings, and it's unlikely that you'll ever come to like yourself. And then you said, "I'm sure that no one would want to get involved with a guy as warped as me." I'm sure you understand this already. Why do you dislike yourself? Why do you focus only on your shortcomings, and why have you decided to not start liking yourself? It's because you are overly afraid of being disliked by other people and getting hurt in your interpersonal relationships.

YOUTH: What do you mean by that?

PHILOSOPHER: Just like the young woman with the fear of blushing, who was afraid of being rejected by the man, you are afraid of being negated by other people. You're afraid of being treated disparagingly, being refused, and sustaining deep mental wounds. You think that instead of getting entangled in such situations, it would be better if you just didn't have relations with anyone in the first place. In other words, your goal is to not get hurt in your relationships with other people.

YOUTH: Huh . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Now, how can that goal be realized? The answer is easy. Just find your shortcomings, start disliking yourself, and become someone who doesn't enter into interpersonal relationships. That way, if you can shut yourself into your own shell, you won't have to interact with anyone, and you'll even have a justification ready whenever other people snub you. That it's because of your shortcomings that you get snubbed, and if things weren't this way, you too could be loved.

YOUTH: Ha-ha! Well, you've really put me in my place now.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't be evasive. Being "the way I am" with all these shortcomings is, for you, a precious virtue. In other words, something that's to your benefit.

YOUTH: Ouch, that hurts. What a sadist; you're diabolical! Okay, yes, it's true: I *am* afraid. I don't want to get hurt in interpersonal relationships. I'm terrified of being snubbed for who I am. It's hard to admit it, but you are right.

PHILOSOPHER: Admitting is a good attitude. But don't forget, it's basically impossible to not get hurt in your relations with other people. When you enter into interpersonal relationships, it is inevitable that to a greater or lesser extent you will get hurt, and you will hurt someone, too. Adler says, "To get rid of one's problems, all one can do is live in the universe all alone." But one can't do such a thing.

All Problems Are Interpersonal Relationship Problems

YOUTH: Wait a minute! I'm supposed to just let that one slip by? "To get rid of one's problems, all one can do is live in the universe all alone"? What do you mean by that? If you lived all alone, wouldn't you be horribly lonely?

PHILOSOPHER: Oh, but being alone isn't what makes you feel lonely. Loneliness is having other people and society and community around you, and having a deep sense of being excluded from them. To feel lonely, we need other people. That is to say, it is only in social contexts that a person becomes an "individual."

YOUTH: If you were really alone, that is, if you existed completely alone in the universe, you wouldn't be an individual and you wouldn't feel lonely, either?

PHILOSOPHER: I suppose the very concept of loneliness wouldn't even come up. You wouldn't need language, and there'd be no use for logic or common sense, either. But such a thing is impossible. Even if you lived on an uninhabited island, you would think about someone far across the ocean. Even if you spend your nights alone, you strain your ears to hear the sound of someone's breath. As long as there is someone out there somewhere, you will be haunted by loneliness.

YOUTH: But then you could just rephrase that as, "If one could live in the universe all alone, one's problems would go away," couldn't you?

PHILOSOPHER: In theory, yes. As Adler goes so far as to assert, "All problems are interpersonal relationship problems."

YOUTH: Can you say that again?

PHILOSOPHER: We can repeat it as many times as you like: All problems are interpersonal relationship problems. This is a concept that runs to the very root of Adlerian psychology. If all interpersonal relationships were gone from this world, which is to say if one were alone in the universe and all other people were gone, all manner of problems would disappear.

YOUTH: That's a lie! It's nothing more than academic sophistry.

PHILOSOPHER: Of course, we cannot do without interpersonal relationships. A human being's existence, in its very essence, assumes the existence of other human beings. Living completely separate from others is, in principle, impossible. As you are indicating, the premise "If one could live all alone in the universe" is unsound.

YOUTH: That's not the issue I am talking about. Sure, interpersonal relationships are probably a big problem. That much I acknowledge. But to say that everything comes down to interpersonal relationship problems, now that's really an extreme position. What about the worry of being cut off from interpersonal relationships, the kind of problems that an individual agonizes over as an individual, problems directed to oneself? Do you deny all that?

PHILOSOPHER: There is no such thing as worry that is completely defined by the individual; so-called internal worry does not exist. Whatever the worry that may arise, the shadows of other people are always present.

YOUTH: But still, you're a philosopher. Human beings have loftier, greater problems than things like interpersonal relationships. What is happiness? What is freedom? And what is the meaning of life? Aren't these the themes that philosophers have been investigating ever since the ancient Greeks? And you're saying, So what? Interpersonal relationships are everything? It seems kind of pedestrian to me. It's hard to believe that a philosopher would say such things.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, then, it seems there's a need to explain things a bit more concretely.

YOUTH: Yes, please do! If you're going to tell me that you're a philosopher, then you've got to really explain things, or else this makes no sense.

PHILOSOPHER: You were so afraid of interpersonal relationships that you came to dislike yourself. You've avoided interpersonal relationships by disliking yourself.



These assertions shook the youth to his very core. The words had an undeniable truth that seemed to pierce his heart. Even so, he had to find a clear rebuttal to the statement that all the problems that people experience are interpersonal relationship problems. Adler was trivializing people's issues. *The problems I'm suffering from aren't so mundane!*

Feelings of Inferiority Are Subjective Assumptions

PHILOSOPHER: Let's look at interpersonal relationships from a slightly different perspective. Are you familiar with the term "feeling of inferiority"?

YOUTH: What a silly question. As you can surely tell from our discussion up to now, I'm just a huge blob of feelings of inferiority.

PHILOSOPHER: What are those feelings, specifically?

YOUTH: Well, for instance, if I see something in a newspaper about a person around my age, someone who's really successful, I'm always overcome with these feelings of inferiority. If someone else who's lived the same amount of time I have is so successful, then what on earth am I doing with myself? Or when I see a friend who seems happy, before I even feel like celebrating with him, I'm filled with envy and frustration. Of course, this pimple-covered face doesn't help matters, and I've got strong feelings of inferiority when it comes to my education and occupation. And then there's my income and social standing. I guess I'm just completely riddled with feelings of inferiority.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. Incidentally, Adler is thought to be the first to use the term "feeling of inferiority" in the kind of context in which it is spoken of today.

YOUTH: Huh, I didn't know that.

PHILOSOPHER: In Adler's native German, the word is *Minderwertigkeitsgefühl*, which means a feeling (*Gefühl*) of having less (*minder*) worth (*Wert*). So "feeling

of inferiority” has to do with one’s value judgment of oneself.

YOUTH: Value judgment?

PHILOSOPHER: It’s the feeling that one has no worth, or that one is worth only so much.

YOUTH: Ah, that’s a feeling I know well. That’s me in a nutshell. Not a day goes by without me tormenting myself that there’s no point in being alive.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, then, let’s have a look at my own feelings of inferiority. When you first met me, what was your impression? In terms of physical characteristics.

YOUTH: Um, well . . .

PHILOSOPHER: There’s no need to hold back. Be direct.

YOUTH: All right, I guess you were smaller than I’d imagined.

PHILOSOPHER: Thank you. I am 61 inches tall. Adler was apparently around the same height. There was a time—until I was right around your age, actually—when I was concerned about my height. I was sure that things would be different if I were of average height, eight or even just four inches taller. As if a more enjoyable life were waiting for me. I talked to a friend about it when I was having these feelings, and he said it was “a bunch of nonsense” and simply dismissed it.

YOUTH: That’s horrible! Some friend.

PHILOSOPHER: And then he said, “What would you do if you got taller? You know, you’ve got a gift for getting people to relax.” With a man who’s big and strong, it’s true, it does seem he can end up intimidating people just because of his size. With someone small like me, on the other hand, people let go of their wariness. So it made me realize that having a small build was a desirable thing

both to me and to those around me. In other words, there was a transformation of values. I'm not worried about my height anymore.

YOUTH: Okay, but that's—

PHILOSOPHER: Wait until I am finished. The important thing here is that my height of 61 inches wasn't inferior.

YOUTH: It wasn't inferior?

PHILOSOPHER: It was not, in fact, lacking in or lesser than something. Sure, my 61 inches is less than the average height, and an objectively measured number. At first glance, one might think it inferior. But the issue is really what sort of meaning I attribute to that height, what sort of value I give it.

YOUTH: What does that mean?

PHILOSOPHER: My feelings about my height were all subjective feelings of inferiority, which arose entirely through my comparing myself to others. That is to say, in my interpersonal relationships. Because if there hadn't been anyone with whom to compare myself, I wouldn't have had any occasion to think I was short. Right now, you too are suffering from various feelings of inferiority. But please understand that what you are feeling is not an objective inferiority but a subjective feeling of inferiority. Even with an issue like height, it's all reduced to its subjectivity.

YOUTH: In other words, the feelings of inferiority we're suffering from are subjective interpretations rather than objective facts?

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. Seeing it from my friend's point of view that I get people to relax or that I don't intimidate them—such aspects can become strong points. Of course, this is a subjective interpretation. You could even say it's an arbitrary assumption. However, there is one good thing about subjectivity: It allows you to make your own choice. Precisely because I am leaving it to subjectivity, the

choice to view my height as either an advantage or disadvantage is left open to me.

YOUTH: The argument that you can choose a new lifestyle?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. We cannot alter objective facts. But subjective interpretations can be altered as much as one likes. And we are inhabitants of a subjective world. We talked about this at the very beginning, right?

YOUTH: Yes; the well water that's sixty degrees.

PHILOSOPHER: Now, remember the German word for a feeling of inferiority, *Minderwertigkeitsgefühl*. As I mentioned a moment ago, "feeling of inferiority" is a term that has to do with one's value judgment of oneself. So what on earth could this value be? Okay, take diamonds, for instance, which are traded at a high value. Or currency. We find particular values for these things and say that one carat is this much, that prices are such and such. But if you change your point of view, a diamond is nothing but a little stone.

YOUTH: Well, intellectually it is.

PHILOSOPHER: In other words, value is something that's based on a social context. The value given to a one-dollar bill is not an objectively attributed value, though that might be a commonsense approach. If one considers its actual cost as printed material, the value is nowhere near a dollar. If I were the only person in this world and no one else existed, I'd probably be putting those one-dollar bills in my fireplace in wintertime. Maybe I'd be using them to blow my nose. Following exactly the same logic, there should have been no reason at all for me to worry about my height.

YOUTH: If you were the only person in this world and no one else existed?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. The problem of value in the end brings us back to interpersonal relationships again.

YOUTH: So this connects to what you were saying about all problems being interpersonal relationship problems?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that's correct.

An Inferiority Complex Is an Excuse

YOUTH: But can you say for sure that feelings of inferiority are really a problem of interpersonal relationships? Even the kind of person who is regarded socially as a success, who doesn't need to debase himself in relationships with other people, still has some feelings of inferiority? Even the businessman who amasses enormous wealth, the peerless beauty who is the envy of all, and the Olympic gold medalist—every one of them would be plagued by feelings of inferiority. Well, that's how it seems to me. How *should* I think about this?

PHILOSOPHER: Adler recognizes that feelings of inferiority are something everyone has. There's nothing bad about feelings of inferiority themselves.

YOUTH: So why do people have them in the first place?

PHILOSOPHER: It's probably necessary to understand this in a certain order. First of all, people enter this world as helpless beings. And people have the universal desire to escape from that helpless state. Adler called this the "pursuit of superiority."

YOUTH: Pursuit of superiority?

PHILOSOPHER: This is something you could think of as simply "hoping to improve" or "pursuing an ideal state." For instance, a toddler learns to steady himself on both legs. He has the universal desire to learn language and to improve. And all the advancements of science throughout human history are due to this "pursuit of superiority," too.

YOUTH: Okay. And then?

PHILOSOPHER: The counterpart of this is the feeling of inferiority. Everyone is in this “condition of wanting to improve” that is the pursuit of superiority. One holds up various ideals or goals and heads toward them. However, on not being able to reach one’s ideals, one harbors a sense of being lesser. For instance, there are chefs who, the more inspired and accomplished they become, are forever beset with the sort of feeling of inferiority that makes them say to themselves, *I’m still not good enough*, or *I’ve got to bring my cooking to the next level*, and that sort of thing.

YOUTH: That’s true.

PHILOSOPHER: Adler is saying that the pursuit of superiority and the feeling of inferiority are not diseases but stimulants to normal, healthy striving and growth. If it is not used in the wrong way, the feeling of inferiority, too, can promote striving and growth.

YOUTH: The feeling of inferiority is a kind of launch pad?

PHILOSOPHER: That’s right. One tries to get rid of one’s feeling of inferiority and keep moving forward. One’s never satisfied with one’s present situation—even if it’s just a single step, one wants to make progress. One wants to be happier. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the state of this kind of feeling of inferiority. There are, however, people who lose the courage to take a single step forward, who cannot accept the fact that the situation can be changed by making realistic efforts. People who, before even doing anything, simply give up and say things like “I’m not good enough anyway” or “Even if I tried, I wouldn’t stand a chance.”

YOUTH: Well, that’s true. There’s no doubt about it—if the feeling of inferiority is strong, most people will become negative and say, “I’m not good enough anyway.” Because that’s what a feeling of inferiority is.

PHILOSOPHER: No, that’s not a feeling of inferiority—that’s an inferiority complex.

YOUTH: A complex? That's what the feeling of inferiority is, isn't it?

PHILOSOPHER: Be careful. The way the word "complex" is used today, it seems to have the same meaning as "feeling of inferiority." You hear people saying, "I've got a complex about my eyelids," or "He's got a complex about his education," that sort of thing. This is an utter misuse of the term. At base, "complex" refers to an abnormal mental state made up of a complicated group of emotions and ideas, and has nothing to do with the feeling of inferiority. For instance, there's Freud's Oedipus complex, which is used in the context of discussing the abnormal attraction of the child to the opposite-sex parent.

YOUTH: Yes. The nuances of abnormality are especially strong when it comes to the mother complex and the father complex.

PHILOSOPHER: For the same reason, then, it's crucial to not mix up "feeling of inferiority" and "inferiority complex," and to think about them as clearly separate.

YOUTH: Concretely, how are they different?

PHILOSOPHER: There is nothing particularly wrong with the feeling of inferiority itself. You understand this point now, right? As Adler says, the feeling of inferiority can be a trigger for striving and growth. For instance, if one had a feeling of inferiority with regard to one's education, and resolved to oneself, *I'm not well educated, so I'll just have to try harder than anyone else*, that would be a desirable direction. The inferiority complex, on the other hand, refers to a condition of having begun to use one's feeling of inferiority as a kind of excuse. So one thinks to oneself, *I'm not well educated, so I can't succeed*, or *I'm not good-looking, so I can't get married*. When someone is insisting on the logic of "A is the situation, so B cannot be done" in such a way in everyday life, that is not something that fits in the feeling of inferiority category. It is an inferiority complex.

YOUTH: No, it's a legitimate causal relationship. If you're not well educated, it takes away your chances of getting work or making it in the world. You're regarded as low on the social scale, and you can't succeed. That's not an excuse at all. It's just a cold hard fact, isn't it?

PHILOSOPHER: No, you are wrong.

YOUTH: How? Where am I wrong?

PHILOSOPHER: What you are calling a causal relationship is something that Adler explains as "apparent cause and effect." That is to say, you convince yourself that there is some serious causal relationship where there is none whatsoever. The other day, someone told me, "The reason I can't get married easily is that my parents got divorced when I was a child." From the viewpoint of Freudian etiology (the attributing of causes), the parents' divorce was a great trauma, which connects in a clear causal relationship with one's views on marriage. Adler, however, with his stance of teleology (the attributing of purpose), rejects such arguments as "apparent cause and effect."

YOUTH: But even so, the reality is that having a good education makes it easier to be successful in society. I had thought you were wise to the ways of the world.

PHILOSOPHER: The real issue is how one confronts that reality. If what you are thinking is, *I'm not well educated, so I can't succeed*, then instead of *I can't succeed*, you should think, *I don't want to succeed*.

YOUTH: I don't want to succeed? What kind of reasoning is that?

PHILOSOPHER: It's simply that it's scary to take even one step forward; also, that you don't want to make realistic efforts. You don't want to change so much that you'd be willing to sacrifice the pleasures you enjoy now—for instance, the time you spend playing and engaged in hobbies. In other words, you're not equipped with the *courage* to change your lifestyle. It's easier with things just as they are now, even if you have some complaints or limitations.

Braggarts Have Feelings of Inferiority

YOUTH: Maybe so, but . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Further, you harbor an inferiority complex about education and think, *I'm not well educated, so I can't succeed*. Put the other way around, the reasoning can be, *If only I were well educated, I could be really successful*.

YOUTH: Hmm, true.

PHILOSOPHER: This is the other aspect of the inferiority complex. Those who manifest their inferiority complexes in words or attitudes, who say that “A is the situation, so B cannot be done,” are implying that if only it were not for A, they'd be capable and have value.

YOUTH: If only it weren't for this, I could do it, too.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. As Adler points out, no one is capable of putting up with having feelings of inferiority for a long period of time. Feelings of inferiority are something that everyone has, but staying in that condition is too heavy to endure forever.

YOUTH: Huh? This is getting pretty confusing.

PHILOSOPHER: Okay, let's go over things one at a time. The condition of having a feeling of inferiority is a condition of feeling some sort of lack in oneself in the present situation. So then, the question is—

YOUTH: How do you fill in the part that's missing, right?

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. How to compensate for the part that is lacking. The healthiest way is to try to compensate through striving and growth. For instance, it could be by applying oneself to one's studies, engaging in constant training, or being diligent in one's work. However, people who aren't equipped with that courage end up stepping into an inferiority complex. Again, it's thinking, *I'm not well educated, so I can't succeed*. And it's implying your capability by saying, "If only I were well educated, I could be really successful." That "the real me," which just happens to be obscured right now by the matter of education, is superior.

YOUTH: No, that doesn't make sense—the second thing you're saying is beyond a feeling of inferiority. That's really more bravado than anything else, isn't it?

PHILOSOPHER: Indeed. The inferiority complex can also develop into another special mental state.

YOUTH: And what is that?

PHILOSOPHER: I doubt you have heard much about it. It's the "superiority complex."

YOUTH: *Superiority* complex?

PHILOSOPHER: One is suffering from strong feelings of inferiority, and, on top of that, one doesn't have the courage to compensate through healthy modes of striving and growth. That being said, one can't tolerate the inferiority complex of thinking, *A is the situation, so B cannot be done*. One can't accept "one's incapable self." At that point, the person thinks of trying to compensate in some other fashion and looks for an easier way out.

YOUTH: What way is that?

PHILOSOPHER: It's to act as if one is indeed superior and to indulge in a fabricated feeling of superiority.

YOUTH: A fabricated feeling of superiority?

PHILOSOPHER: A familiar example would be “giving authority.”

YOUTH: What does that mean?

PHILOSOPHER: One makes a show of being on good terms with a powerful person (broadly speaking—it could be anyone from the leader of your school class to a famous celebrity). And by doing that, one lets it be known that one is special. Behaviors like misrepresenting one’s work experience or excessive allegiance to particular brands of clothing are forms of giving authority, and probably also have aspects of the superiority complex. In each case, it isn’t that the “I” is actually superior or special. It is only that one is making the “I” look superior by linking it to authority. In short, it’s a fabricated feeling of superiority.

YOUTH: And at the base of that, there is an intense feeling of inferiority?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. I don’t know much about fashion, but I think it’s advisable to think of people who wear rings with rubies and emeralds on all their fingers as having issues with feelings of inferiority, rather than issues of aesthetic sensibility. In other words, they have signs of a superiority complex.

YOUTH: Right.

PHILOSOPHER: But those who make themselves look bigger on borrowed power are essentially living according to other people’s value systems—they are living other people’s lives. This is a point that must be emphasized.

YOUTH: So, a superiority complex. That’s a very interesting psychology. Can you give me a different example?

PHILOSOPHER: There’s the kind of person who likes to boast about his achievements. Someone who clings to his past glory and is always recounting memories of the time when his light shone brightest. Maybe you know some people like this. All such people can be said to have superiority complexes.

YOUTH: The kind of man who boasts about his achievements? Yes, it is an arrogant attitude, but he can boast because he actually is superior. You can't call that a fabricated feeling of superiority.

PHILOSOPHER: Ah, but you are wrong. Those who go so far as to boast about things out loud actually have no confidence in themselves. As Adler clearly indicates, "The one who boasts does so only out of a feeling of inferiority."

YOUTH: You're saying that boasting is an inverted feeling of inferiority?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. If one really has confidence in oneself, one doesn't feel the need to boast. It's because one's feeling of inferiority is strong that one boasts. One feels the need to flaunt one's superiority all the more. There's the fear that if one doesn't do that, not a single person will accept one "the way I am." This is a full-blown superiority complex.

YOUTH: So though one would think from the sound of the words that inferiority complex and superiority complex were polar opposites, in actuality they border on each other?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, they are clearly connected. Now, there is one last example I'd like to give, a complex example that deals with boasting. It is a pattern leading to a particular feeling of superiority that manifests due to the feeling of inferiority itself becoming intensified. Concretely speaking, it's bragging about one's own misfortune.

YOUTH: Bragging about one's own misfortune?

PHILOSOPHER: The person who assumes a boasting manner when talking about his upbringing and the like, the various misfortunes that have rained down upon him. If someone should try to comfort this person, or suggest some change be made, he'll refuse the helping hand by saying, "You don't understand how I feel."

YOUTH: Well, there are people like that, but . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Such people try to make themselves “special” by way of their experience of misfortune, and with the single fact of their misfortune try to place themselves above others. Take the fact that I am short, for instance. Let’s say that kind-hearted people come up to me and say, “It’s nothing to worry about,” or “Such things have nothing to do with human values.” Now, if I were to reject them and say, “You think you know what short people go through, huh?” no one would say a thing to me anymore. I’m sure that everyone around me would start treating me just as if I were a boil about to burst and would handle me very carefully—or, I should say, circumspectly.

YOUTH: Absolutely true.

PHILOSOPHER: By doing that, my position becomes superior to other people’s, and I can become special. Quite a few people try to be “special” by adopting this kind of attitude when they are sick or injured, or suffering the mental anguish of heartbreak.

YOUTH: So they reveal their feeling of inferiority and use it to their advantage?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. They use their misfortune to their advantage and try to control the other party with it. By declaring how unfortunate they are and how much they have suffered, they are trying to worry the people around them (their family and friends, for example), and to restrict their speech and behavior, and control them. The people I was talking about at the very beginning, who shut themselves up in their rooms, frequently indulge in feelings of superiority and use misfortune to their advantage. So much so that Adler himself pointed out, “In our culture weakness can be quite strong and powerful.”

YOUTH: So weakness is powerful?

PHILOSOPHER: Adler says, “In fact, if we were to ask ourselves who is the strongest person in our culture, the logical answer would be, the baby. The baby rules and cannot be dominated.” The baby rules over the adults with his weakness. And it is because of this weakness that no one can control him.

YOUTH: I've never encountered that viewpoint.

PHILOSOPHER: Of course, the words of the person who has been hurt—"You don't understand how I feel"—are likely to contain a certain degree of truth. Completely understanding the feelings of the person who is suffering is something that no one is capable of. But as long as one continues to use one's misfortune to one's advantage in order to be "special," one will always need that misfortune.



The youth and philosopher had now covered a series of discussion topics: the feeling of inferiority, the inferiority complex, and the superiority complex. Psychology keywords though they clearly were, the truths they contained differed greatly from the youth's imagined meanings. Still, something didn't feel right to him, somehow. *What is it about all this that I'm having a hard time accepting? Well, it must be the introductory part, the premise, that is giving me doubts.* The youth calmly opened his mouth to speak.

Life Is Not a Competition

YOUTH: But I guess I still don't really get it.

PHILOSOPHER: Okay, ask me anything you like.

YOUTH: Adler recognizes that the pursuit of superiority—one's trying to be a more superior being—is a universal desire, doesn't he? On the other hand, he's striking a note of warning with regard to excessive feelings of inferiority and superiority. It'd be easy to understand if he could renounce the pursuit of superiority—then I could accept it. What are we supposed to do?

PHILOSOPHER: Think about it this way. When we refer to the pursuit of superiority, there's a tendency to think of it as the desire to try to be superior to other people; to climb higher, even if it means kicking others down—you know, the image of ascending a stairway and pushing people out of the way to get to the top. Adler does not uphold such attitudes, of course. Rather, he's saying that on the same level playing field, there are people who are moving forward, and there are people who are moving forward behind them. Keep that image in mind. Though the distance covered and the speed of walking differ, everyone is walking equally in the same flat place. The pursuit of superiority is the mind-set of taking a single step forward on one's own feet, not the mind-set of competition of the sort that necessitates aiming to be greater than other people.

YOUTH: So life is not a competition?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. It's enough to just keep moving in a forward direction, without competing with anyone. And, of course, there is no need to

compare oneself with others.

YOUTH: No, that's impossible. We'll always compare ourselves to other people, no matter what. That's exactly where our feeling of inferiority comes from, isn't it?

PHILOSOPHER: A healthy feeling of inferiority is not something that comes from comparing oneself to others; it comes from one's comparison with one's ideal self.

YOUTH: But . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Look, all of us are different. Gender, age, knowledge, experience, appearance—no two of us are exactly the same. Let's acknowledge in a positive manner the fact that other people are different from us. And that we are not the same, but we are equal.

YOUTH: We are not the same, but we are equal?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. Everyone is different. Don't mix up that difference with good and bad, and superior and inferior. Whatever differences we may have, we are all equal.

YOUTH: No distinction of rank for people. Idealistically speaking, I suppose so. But aren't we trying to have an honest discussion about reality now? Would you really say, for instance, that I, an adult, and a child who is still struggling with his arithmetic are equal?

PHILOSOPHER: In terms of the amount of knowledge and experience, and then the amount of responsibility that can be taken, there are bound to be differences. The child might not be able to tie his shoes properly, or figure out complicated mathematical equations, or be able to take the same degree of responsibility as an adult when problems arise. However, such things shouldn't have anything to do with human values. My answer is the same. Human beings are all equal, but not the same.

YOUTH: Then are you saying that a child should be treated like a full-grown adult?

PHILOSOPHER: No. Instead of treating the child like an adult, or like a child, one must treat him or her like a human being. One interacts with the child with sincerity, as another human being just like oneself.

YOUTH: Let's change the question. All people are equal. They're on the same level playing field. But actually, there's a disparity here, isn't there? Those who move forward are superior, and those who pursue them from behind are inferior. So we end up at the problem of superior and inferior, don't we?

PHILOSOPHER: No, we do not. It does not matter if one is trying to walk in front of others or walk behind them. It is as if we are moving through a flat space that has no vertical axis. We do not walk in order to compete with someone. It is in trying to progress past who one is now that there is value.

YOUTH: Have you become free from all forms of competition?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. I do not think about gaining status or honor, and I live my life as an outsider philosopher without any connection whatsoever to worldly competition.

YOUTH: Does that mean you dropped out of competition? That you somehow accepted defeat?

PHILOSOPHER: No. I withdrew from places that are preoccupied with winning and losing. When one is trying to be oneself, competition will inevitably get in the way.

YOUTH: No way! That's a tired-out old man's argument. Young folks like me have to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps amid the tension of competition. It's because I don't have a rival running alongside me that I can't outdo myself. What's wrong with thinking of interpersonal relationships as competitive?

PHILOSOPHER: If that rival was someone you could call a comrade, it's possible that it would lead to self-improvement. But in many cases, a competitor will not be your comrade.

YOUTH: Meaning what, exactly?

You're the Only One Worrying About Your Appearance

PHILOSOPHER: Let's tie up the loose ends. At the outset, you expressed dissatisfaction with Adler's definition that all problems are interpersonal relationship problems, right? That was the basis for our discussion on feelings of inferiority.

YOUTH: Yes, that's correct. The subject of feelings of inferiority was too intense, and I was on the verge of forgetting that point. Why did you bring up the subject in the first place?

PHILOSOPHER: It is connected with the subject of competition. Please remember that. If there is competition at the core of a person's interpersonal relationships, he will not be able to escape interpersonal relationship problems or escape misfortune.

YOUTH: Why not?

PHILOSOPHER: Because at the end of a competition, there are winners and losers.

YOUTH: It's perfectly fine to have winners and losers!

PHILOSOPHER: Give some thought to it, then, if it were you, specifically, who had a consciousness of being in competition with the people around you. In your relations with them, you would have no choice but to be conscious of victory or defeat. Mr. A got into this famous university, Mr. B found work at

that big company, and Mr. C has hooked up with such a nice-looking woman—and you'll compare yourself to them and think, *This is all I've got*.

YOUTH: Ha-ha. That's pretty specific.

PHILOSOPHER: When one is conscious of competition and victory and defeat, it is inevitable that feelings of inferiority will arise. Because one is constantly comparing oneself to others and thinking, *I beat that person* or *I lost to that person*. The inferiority complex and the superiority complex are extensions of that. Now, what kind of being do you think the other person is to you, at that point?

YOUTH: I don't know—a rival, I guess?

PHILOSOPHER: No, not a mere rival. Before you know it, you start to see each and every person, everyone in the whole world, as your enemy.

YOUTH: My enemy?

PHILOSOPHER: You start to think that people are always looking down on you and treating you with scorn, that they're all enemies who must never be underestimated, who lie in wait for any opening and attack at the drop of a hat. In short, that the world is a terrifying place.

YOUTH: Enemies who must never be underestimated . . . That's who I'm in competition with?

PHILOSOPHER: This is what is so terrifying about competition. Even if you're not a loser, even if you're someone who keeps on winning, if you are someone who has placed himself in competition, you will never have a moment's peace. You don't want to be a loser. And you always have to keep on winning if you don't want to be a loser. You can't trust other people. The reason so many people don't really feel happy while they're building up their success in the eyes of society is that they are living in competition. Because to them, the world is a perilous place that is overflowing with enemies.

YOUTH: I suppose so, but . . .

PHILOSOPHER: But do other people actually look at you so much? Are they really watching you around the clock and lying in wait for the perfect moment to attack? It seems rather unlikely. A young friend of mine, when he was a teenager, used to spend a lot of time in front of the mirror arranging his hair. And once, when he was doing that, his grandmother said, “You’re the only one who’s worried how you look.” He says that it got a bit easier for him to deal with life after that.

YOUTH: Hey, that’s a dig at me, isn’t it? Sure, maybe I do see the people around me as enemies. I’m constantly in fear of being attacked, of the arrows that could come flying at me at any moment. I always think that I’m being watched by others, that I’m being subjected to harsh judgment, and that I’m going to be attacked. And it’s probably true that this is a self-conscious reaction, just like the mirror-obsessed teenager. The people of the world aren’t paying attention to me. Even if I were to go walking on my hands down the street, they’d take no notice! But I don’t know. Are you saying, after all, that my feeling of inferiority is something that I chose, that has some sort of goal? That just doesn’t make any sense to me.

PHILOSOPHER: And why is that?

YOUTH: I have a brother who is three years older than I am. He fits the classic image of the big brother—he always does what our parents say, he excels in his studies and in sports, and he’s the very picture of diligence. And from the time I was little, I was always compared to him. He is older and more advanced, so of course I could never beat him at anything. Our parents did not care at all about such circumstances, and never gave me any sign of recognition. Whatever I did, I got treated like a child, and I was berated at every opportunity and told to be quiet. I learned to keep my feelings to myself. I’ve lived my life totally steeped in feelings of inferiority, and I had no choice but to be conscious of being in competition with my brother!

PHILOSOPHER: I see.

YOUTH: Sometimes I think of it like this: I'm like a gourd that grew without getting enough sun. So it is only natural that I'm all twisted up with feelings of inferiority. If there's anyone who could grow straight in such a situation, well, I'd love to meet him!

PHILOSOPHER: I understand. I really do understand how you feel. Now, let's look at "competition" while taking into consideration your relationship with your brother. If you didn't think with a competition orientation, with regard to your brother and your other interpersonal relationships, how would people seem to you?

YOUTH: Well, my brother is my brother, and I guess other people are another story.

PHILOSOPHER: No, they should become more positive comrades.

YOUTH: Comrades?

PHILOSOPHER: Earlier, didn't you say, "I can't celebrate other people's happiness with all my heart"? You think of interpersonal relationships as competition; you perceive other people's happiness as "my defeat," and that is why you can't celebrate it. However, once one is released from the schema of competition, the need to triumph over someone disappears. One is also released from the fear that says, *Maybe I will lose*. And one becomes able to celebrate other people's happiness with all one's heart. One may become able to contribute actively to other people's happiness. The person who always has the will to help another in times of need—that is someone who may properly be called your comrade.

YOUTH: Hmm.

PHILOSOPHER: Now we come to the important part. When you are able to truly feel that "people are my comrades," your way of looking at the world will change utterly. No longer will you think of the world as a perilous place, or be plagued

by needless doubts; the world will appear before you as a safe and pleasant place. And your interpersonal relationship problems will decrease dramatically.

YOUTH: What a happy person you are! But you know, that's all like a sunflower. It's the reasoning of a sunflower that is bathed in full sunshine every day and is nurtured with ample watering. A gourd grown in the dim shade doesn't do so well!

PHILOSOPHER: You are returning to etiology (the attributing of causes) again.

YOUTH: Oh, yes, I sure am!



Raised by strict parents, the youth had been oppressed and compared to his elder brother ever since childhood. None of his opinions were ever heard, and he was subjected to the violent words that he was a poor excuse for a little brother. Unable to make friends even at school, he spent all his free time alone in the library, which became his sole place of refuge. This youth who had passed his early years in such a way was truly an inhabitant of etiology. If he had not been raised by those parents, if that elder brother had never existed, and if he had not attended that school, he could have had a brighter life. The youth had been trying to participate in the discussion as coolheadedly as possible, but now his many years of pent-up feelings came bursting out.

From Power Struggle to Revenge

YOUTH: Okay, all this talk about teleology and such is pure sophistry, and trauma definitely does exist. And people cannot break free from the past. Surely you realize that? We cannot go back to the past in a time machine. As long as the past exists as the past, we live within contexts from the past. If one were to treat the past as something that does not exist, that would be the same as negating the entire life one has led. Are you suggesting I choose such an irresponsible life?

PHILOSOPHER: It is true that one cannot use a time machine or turn back the hands of time. But what kind of meaning does one attribute to past events? This is the task that is given to “you now.”

YOUTH: All right, so let’s talk about “now.” Last time, you said that people fabricate the emotion of anger, right? And that that is the standpoint of teleology. I still cannot accept that statement. For example, how would you explain instances of anger toward society, or anger toward government? Would you say that these, too, are emotions fabricated in order to push one’s opinions?

PHILOSOPHER: Certainly, there are times when I feel indignation with regard to social problems. But I would say that rather than a sudden burst of emotion, it is indignation based on logic. There is a difference between personal anger (personal grudge) and indignation with regard to society’s contradictions and injustices (righteous indignation). Personal anger soon cools. Righteous indignation, on the other hand, lasts for a long time. Anger as an expression of a personal grudge is nothing but a tool for making others submit to you.

YOUTH: You say that personal grudges and righteous indignation are different?

PHILOSOPHER: They are completely different. Because righteous indignation goes beyond one's own interests.

YOUTH: Then I'll ask about personal grudges. Surely even you get angry sometimes—for instance, if someone hurls abuse at you for no particular reason—don't you?

PHILOSOPHER: No, I do not.

YOUTH: Come on, be honest.

PHILOSOPHER: If someone were to abuse me to my face, I would think about the person's hidden goal. Even if you are not directly abusive, when you feel genuinely angry due to another person's words or behavior, please consider that the person is challenging you to a power struggle.

YOUTH: A power struggle?

PHILOSOPHER: For instance, a child will tease an adult with various pranks and misbehaviors. In many cases, this is done with the goal of getting attention and will cease just before the adult gets genuinely angry. However, if the child does not stop before the adult gets genuinely angry, then his goal is actually to get in a fight.

YOUTH: Why would he want to get in a fight?

PHILOSOPHER: He wants to win. He wants to prove his power by winning.

YOUTH: I don't really get that. Could you give me some concrete examples?

PHILOSOPHER: Let's say you and a friend have been discussing the current political situation. Before long, it turns into a heated argument, and neither of you is willing to accept any differences of opinion until finally it reaches the point where he starts engaging in personal attacks—that you're stupid, and it's because of people like you that this country doesn't change, that sort of thing.

YOUTH: But if someone said that to me, I wouldn't be able to put up with it.

PHILOSOPHER: In this case, what is the other person's goal? Is it only that he wants to discuss politics? No, it isn't. It's that he finds you unbearable, and he wants to criticize and provoke you, and make you submit through a power struggle. If you get angry at this point, the moment he has been anticipating will arrive, and the relationship will suddenly turn into a power struggle. No matter what the provocation, you must not get taken in.

YOUTH: No, there's no need to run away from it. If someone wants to start a fight, it's fine to accept it. Because it's the other guy who's at fault, anyway. You can bash his nose in, the stupid fool. With words, that is.

PHILOSOPHER: Now let's say you take control of the quarrel. And then the other man, who was seeking to defeat you, withdraws in a sportsmanlike manner. The thing is, the power struggle doesn't end there. Having lost the dispute, he rushes on to the next stage.

YOUTH: The next stage?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. It's the revenge stage. Though he has withdrawn for the time being, he will be scheming some revenge in another place and another form, and will reappear with an act of retaliation.

YOUTH: Like what, for instance?

PHILOSOPHER: The child oppressed by his parents will turn to delinquency. He'll stop going to school. He'll cut his wrists or engage in other acts of self-harm. In Freudian etiology, this is regarded as simple cause and effect: The parents raised the child in this way, and that is why the child grew up to be like this. It's just like pointing out that a plant wasn't watered, so it withered. It's an interpretation that is certainly easy to understand. But Adlerian teleology does not turn a blind eye to the goal that the child is hiding. That is to say, the goal of revenge on the parents. If he becomes a delinquent, stops going to school, cuts

his wrists, or things like that, the parents will be upset. They'll panic and worry themselves sick over him. It is in the knowledge that this will happen that the child engages in problem behavior. So that the current goal (revenge on the parents) can be realized, not because he is motivated by past causes (home environment).

YOUTH: He engages in problem behavior in order to upset his parents?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. There are probably a lot of people who feel mystified by seeing a child who cuts his wrists, and they think, *Why would he do such a thing?* But try to think how the people around the child—the parents, for instance—will feel as a result of the behavior of wrist cutting. If you do, the goal behind the behavior should come into view of its own accord.

YOUTH: The goal being revenge?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. And once the interpersonal relationship reaches the revenge stage, it is almost impossible for either party to find a solution. To prevent this from happening, when one is challenged to a power struggle, one must never allow oneself to be taken in.

Admitting Fault Is Not Defeat

YOUTH: All right, then what should you do when you're subjected to personal attacks right to your face? Do you just grin and bear it?

PHILOSOPHER: No, the idea that you are "bearing it" is proof that you are still stuck in the power struggle. When you are challenged to a fight, and you sense that it is a power struggle, step down from the conflict as soon as possible. Do not answer his action with a reaction. That is the only thing we can do.

YOUTH: But is it really that easy to not respond to provocation? In the first place, how would you say I should control my anger?

PHILOSOPHER: When you control your anger, you're "bearing it," right? Instead, let's learn a way to settle things without using the emotion of anger. Because after all, anger is a tool. A means for achieving a goal.

YOUTH: That's a tough one.

PHILOSOPHER: The first thing that I want you to understand here is the fact that anger is a form of communication, and that communication is nevertheless possible without using anger. We can convey our thoughts and intentions and be accepted without any need for anger. If you learn to understand this experientially, the anger emotion will stop appearing all on its own.

YOUTH: But what if they come at you with mistaken accusations, or make insulting comments? I shouldn't get angry even then?

PHILOSOPHER: You don't seem to understand yet. It's not that you mustn't get angry, but that there is no need to rely on the tool of anger. Irascible people do not have short tempers—it is only that they do not know that there are effective communication tools other than anger. That is why people end up saying things like “I just snapped” or, “He flew into a rage.” We end up relying on anger to communicate.

YOUTH: Effective communication tools other than anger . . .

PHILOSOPHER: We have language. We can communicate through language. Believe in the power of language and the language of logic.

YOUTH: Certainly, if I did not believe in that, we wouldn't be having this dialogue.

PHILOSOPHER: One more thing about power struggles. In every instance, no matter how much you might think you are right, try not to criticize the other party on that basis. This is an interpersonal relationship trap that many people fall into.

YOUTH: Why's that?

PHILOSOPHER: The moment one is convinced that “I am right” in an interpersonal relationship, one has already stepped into a power struggle.

YOUTH: Just because you think you're right? No way, that's just blowing things all out of proportion.

PHILOSOPHER: I am right. That is to say, the other party is wrong. At that point, the focus of the discussion shifts from “the rightness of the assertions” to “the state of the interpersonal relationship.” In other words, the conviction that “I am right” leads to the assumption that “this person is wrong,” and finally it becomes a contest and you are thinking, *I have to win*. It's a power struggle through and through.

YOUTH: Hmm.

PHILOSOPHER: In the first place, the rightness of one's assertions has nothing to do with winning or losing. If you think you are right, regardless of what other people's opinions might be, the matter should be closed then and there. However, many people will rush into a power struggle and try to make others submit to them. And that is why they think of "admitting a mistake" as "admitting defeat."

YOUTH: Yes, there definitely is that aspect.

PHILOSOPHER: Because of one's mind-set of not wanting to lose, one is unable to admit one's mistake, the result being that one ends up choosing the wrong path. Admitting mistakes, conveying words of apology, and stepping down from power struggles—none of these things is defeat. The pursuit of superiority is not something that is carried out through competition with other people.

YOUTH: So when you're hung up on winning and losing, you lose the ability to make the right choices?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. It clouds your judgment, and all you can see is imminent victory or defeat. Then you turn down the wrong path. It's only when we take away the lenses of competition and winning and losing that we can begin to correct and change ourselves.

Overcoming the Tasks That Face You in Life

YOUTH: Okay, but there's still a problem. It's the statement "All problems are interpersonal relationship problems." I can see that the feeling of inferiority is an interpersonal relationship worry, and that it has certain effects on us. And I accept as logical the idea that life is not a competition. I cannot see other people as comrades, and somewhere inside me I think of them as enemies. This is clearly the case. But the thing I find puzzling is, why does Adler place so much importance on interpersonal relationships? Why does he go so far as to say "all" of them?

PHILOSOPHER: The issue of interpersonal relationships is so important that no matter how broadly it is addressed, it never seems to suffice. Last time I told you, "What you are lacking is the courage to be happy." You remember that, right?

YOUTH: I couldn't forget it if I tried.

PHILOSOPHER: So why do you see other people as enemies, and why can't you think of them as your comrades? It is because you have lost your courage and you are running away from your "life tasks."

YOUTH: My life tasks?

PHILOSOPHER: Right. This is a crucial point. In Adlerian psychology, clear objectives are laid out for human behavior and psychology.

YOUTH: What sort of objectives?

PHILOSOPHER: First, there are two objectives for behavior: to be self-reliant and to live in harmony with society. Then, the two objectives for the psychology that supports these behaviors are the consciousness that *I have the ability* and the consciousness that *people are my comrades*.

YOUTH: Just a moment. I'm writing this down . . . There are the following two objectives for behavior: to be self-reliant and to live in harmony with society. And there are the following two objectives for the psychology that supports these behaviors: the consciousness that *I have the ability* and the consciousness that *people are my comrades* . . . Okay, I can see that it is a crucial subject: to be self-reliant as an individual while living in harmony with people and society. It seems to tie in with everything we've been discussing.

PHILOSOPHER: And these objectives can be achieved by facing what Adler calls "life tasks."

YOUTH: What are life tasks?

PHILOSOPHER: Let's think of the word "life" as tracing back to childhood. During childhood, we are protected by our parents and can live without needing to work. But eventually, the time comes when one has to be self-reliant. One cannot be dependent on one's parents forever, and one has to be self-reliant mentally, of course, and self-reliant in a social sense as well, and one has to engage in some form of work—which is not limited to the narrow definition of working at a company. Furthermore, in the process of growing up, one begins to have all kinds of friend relationships. Of course, one may form a love relationship with someone that may even lead to marriage. If it does, one will start a marital relationship, and if one has children, a parent-child relationship will begin. Adler made three categories of the interpersonal relationships that arise out of these processes. He referred to them as "tasks of work," "tasks of friendship," and "tasks of love," and all together as "life tasks."

YOUTH: Are these tasks the obligations one has as a member of society? In other words, things like labor and payment of taxes?

PHILOSOPHER: No, please think of this solely in terms of interpersonal relationships. That is, the distance and depth in one's interpersonal relationships. Adler sometimes used the expression "three social ties" to emphasize the point.

YOUTH: The distance and depth in one's interpersonal relationships?

PHILOSOPHER: The interpersonal relationships that a single individual has no choice but to confront when attempting to live as a social being—these are the life tasks. They are indeed tasks in the sense that one has no choice but to confront them.

YOUTH: Would you be more specific?

PHILOSOPHER: First, let's look at the tasks of work. Regardless of the kind of work, there is no work that can be completed all by oneself. For instance, I am usually here in my study writing a manuscript. Writing is completely autonomous work that I cannot have someone else do for me. But then there is the presence of the editor and many others, without whose assistance the work would not be realized, from the people who handle book design and printing to the distribution and bookstore staff. Work that can be completed without the cooperation of other people is in principle unfeasible.

YOUTH: Broadly speaking, I suppose so.

PHILOSOPHER: However, considered from the viewpoint of distance and depth, interpersonal relationships of work may be said to have the lowest hurdles. Interpersonal relationships of work have the easy-to-understand common objective of obtaining good results, so people can cooperate even if they don't always get along, and to some extent they have no choice but to cooperate. And as long as a relationship is formed solely on the basis of work, it will go back to being a relationship with an outsider when working hours are over or one changes jobs.

YOUTH: Yes, so true.

PHILOSOPHER: And the ones who get tripped up in the interpersonal relationships at this stage are the people referred to as “NEETs” (a young person not in education, employment, or training) or “shut-ins” (a person confined indoors).

YOUTH: Huh? Wait a minute! Are you saying that they don’t try to work simply because they want to avoid the interpersonal relationships that are associated with work, not that they don’t want to work or that they’re refusing to do manual labor?

PHILOSOPHER: Putting aside the question of whether or not they are conscious of it themselves, interpersonal relationships are at the core. For example, a man sends out résumés to find work and gets interviews, only to be rejected by one company after another. It hurts his pride. He starts to wonder what the purpose in working is if he has to go through such things. Or he makes a big mistake at work. The company is going to lose a huge sum of money because of him. Feeling utterly hopeless, as if he’s plunged into darkness, he can’t bear the thought of coming in to work the following day. None of these are examples of the work itself becoming disagreeable. What is disagreeable is being criticized or rebuked by others through the work, getting labeled as having no ability or being incompetent or unsuited to the work, and hurting the dignity of one’s irreplaceable self. In other words, everything is an interpersonal relationship issue.

Red String and Rigid Chains

YOUTH: Well, I'll save my objections for later. Next, what about the task of friendship?

PHILOSOPHER: This is a friend relationship in a broader sense, away from work, as there is none of the compulsion of the workplace. It is a relationship that is difficult to initiate or deepen.

YOUTH: Ah, you've got that right! If there's a space, like one's school or workplace, one can still build a relationship. But then it would be a superficial relationship that is limited to that space. To even attempt to initiate a personal friend relationship, or find a friend in a place outside the school or workplace, would be extremely difficult.

PHILOSOPHER: Do you have anyone whom you would call a close friend?

YOUTH: I have a friend. But I'm not sure I'd call him a close friend . . .

PHILOSOPHER: It used to be the same for me. When I was in high school, I did not even try to make friends and spent my days studying Greek and German, quietly absorbed in reading philosophy books. My mother was worried about me and went to consult my homeroom teacher. And my teacher told her, "There's no need to worry. He's a person who doesn't need friends." Those words were very encouraging to my mother, and to me as well.

YOUTH: A person who doesn't need friends? So in high school you didn't have a single friend?

PHILOSOPHER: I did have one friend. He said, “There’s nothing really worth learning at a university,” and in the end he actually did not enter university. He went into seclusion up in the mountains for several years, and these days I hear he’s working in journalism in Southeast Asia. I haven’t seen him in decades, but I have the feeling that if we got together again, we’d be able to hang out just as we did back then. A lot of people think that the more friends you have the better, but I’m not so sure about that. There’s no value at all in the number of friends or acquaintances you have. And this is a subject that connects with the task of love, but what we should be thinking about is the distance and depth of the relationship.

YOUTH: Will it be possible for me to make close friends?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course it will. If you change, those around you will change too. They will have no choice but to change. Adlerian psychology is a psychology for changing oneself, not a psychology for changing others. Instead of waiting for others to change or waiting for the situation to change, you take the first step forward yourself.

YOUTH: Hmm . . .

PHILOSOPHER: The fact is that you came like this to visit me in my room. And, in you, I have found a young friend.

YOUTH: I am your friend?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, because you are. The dialogue going on here is not counseling, and we do not have a work relationship. To me, you are an irreplaceable friend. Don’t you think so?

YOUTH: I’m your . . . irreplaceable friend? No, I won’t think anything about that right now. Let’s just keep going. What about the last one, the task of love?

PHILOSOPHER: Think of it as divided into two stages: one, what are known as love relationships; and two, relationships with family, in particular parent-child

relationships. We have discussed work and friendship, but of the three tasks, most likely it is the task of love that is the most difficult. When a friend relationship has turned into love, speech and conduct that were permitted between friends may no longer be permitted the moment they become lovers. Specifically, that would mean not permitting socializing with friends of the opposite sex, and in some cases just speaking on the telephone to someone of the opposite sex is enough to arouse jealousy. The distance is that close, and the relationship that deep.

YOUTH: Yes, I suppose it can't be helped.

PHILOSOPHER: But Adler does not accept restricting one's partner. If the person seems to be happy, one can frankly celebrate that condition. That is love. Relationships in which people restrict each other eventually fall apart.

YOUTH: Wait, that's an argument that can only lead to affirming infidelity. Because if one's partner were happily having an affair, you're saying that one should celebrate even that.

PHILOSOPHER: No, I am not affirming someone having an affair. Think about it this way: The kind of relationship that feels somehow oppressive and strained when the two people are together cannot be called love, even if there is passion. When one can think, *Whenever I am with this person, I can behave very freely*, one can really feel love. One can be in a calm and quite natural state, without having feelings of inferiority or being beset with the need to flaunt one's superiority. That is what real love is like. Restriction, on the other hand, is a manifestation of the mind-set of attempting to control one's partner, and also an idea founded on a sense of distrust. Being in the same space with someone who distrusts you isn't a natural situation that one can put up with, is it? As Adler says, "If two people want to live together on good terms, they must treat each other as equal personalities."

YOUTH: Okay.

PHILOSOPHER: However, in love relationships and marital relationships, there is the option of separating. So even a husband and wife who have been together for many years can separate if continuing the relationship becomes distressful. In a parent-child relationship, however, in principle this cannot be done. If romantic love is a relationship connected by red string, then the relationship between parents and children is bound in rigid chains. And a pair of small scissors is all you have. This is the difficulty of the parent-child relationship.

YOUTH: So what can one do?

PHILOSOPHER: What I can say at this stage is: You must not run away. No matter how distressful the relationship, you must not avoid or put off dealing with it. Even if in the end you're going to cut it with scissors, first you have to face it. The worst thing to do is to just stand still with the situation as it is. It is fundamentally impossible for a person to live life completely alone, and it is only in social contexts that the person becomes an "individual." That is why in Adlerian psychology, self-reliance as an individual and cooperation within society are put forth as overarching objectives. Then, how can one achieve these objectives? On this point, Adler speaks of surmounting the three tasks of work, friendship, and love, the tasks of the interpersonal relationships that a living person has no choice but to confront.



The youth was still struggling to grasp their true meaning.

Don't Fall for the "Life-Lie"

YOUTH: Ah, it's getting confusing again. You said that I see other people as enemies and can't think of them as comrades because I'm running away from my life tasks. What was that supposed to mean, anyway?

PHILOSOPHER: Suppose, for instance, that there is a certain Mr. A whom you don't like because he has some flaws that are hard to forgive.

YOUTH: Ha-ha, if we're looking for people I don't like, there's no shortage of candidates.

PHILOSOPHER: But it isn't that you dislike Mr. A because you can't forgive his flaws. You had the goal of taking a dislike to Mr. A beforehand and then started looking for the flaws to satisfy that goal.

YOUTH: That's ridiculous! Why would I do that?

PHILOSOPHER: So that you could avoid an interpersonal relationship with Mr. A.

YOUTH: No way, that's completely out of the question. It's obvious that the order of things is backward. He did something I didn't like, that's why. If he hadn't, I'd have no reason for taking a dislike to him.

PHILOSOPHER: No, you are wrong. It's easy to see if you think back on the example of separating from a person whom one has been in a love relationship with. In relationships between lovers or married couples, there are times when, after a certain point, one becomes exasperated with everything one's partner says

or does. For instance, she doesn't care for the way he eats; his slovenly appearance at home fills her with revulsion, and even his snoring sets her off. Even though until a few months ago, none of it had ever bothered her before.

YOUTH: Yes, that sounds familiar.

PHILOSOPHER: The person feels this way because at some stage she has resolved to herself, *I want to end this relationship*, and she has been looking around for the material with which to end it. The other person hasn't changed at all. It is her own goal that has changed. Look, people are extremely selfish creatures who are capable of finding any number of flaws and shortcomings in others whenever the mood strikes them. A man of perfect character could come along, and one would have no difficulty in digging up some reason to dislike him. That's exactly why the world can become a perilous place at any time, and it's always possible to see everyone as one's enemies.

YOUTH: So I am making up flaws in other people just so that I can avoid my life tasks, and further more, so I can avoid interpersonal relationships? And I am running away by thinking of other people as my enemies?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. Adler called the state of coming up with all manner of pretexts in order to avoid the life tasks the "life-lie."

YOUTH: Okay . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, it's a severe term. One shifts one's responsibility for the situation one is currently in to someone else. One is running away from one's life tasks by saying that everything is the fault of other people, or the fault of one's environment. It's exactly the same as with the story I mentioned earlier about the female student with the fear of blushing. One lies to oneself, and one lies to the people around one, too. When you really think about it, it's a pretty severe term.

YOUTH: But how can you conclude that I am lying? You don't know anything about what kind of people I have around me, or what kind of life I lead, do you?

PHILOSOPHER: True, I don't know anything about your past. Not about your parents, or your elder brother either. I know only one thing.

YOUTH: What's that?

PHILOSOPHER: The fact that you—and no one else—are the one who decided your lifestyle.

YOUTH: Argh!

PHILOSOPHER: If your lifestyle were determined by other people or your environment, it would certainly be possible to shift responsibility. But we choose our lifestyles ourselves. It's clear where the responsibility lies.

YOUTH: So you're out to condemn me. But you're calling people liars and cowards. And saying that everyone is my responsibility.

PHILOSOPHER: You must not use the power of anger to look away. This is a very important point. Adler never discusses the life tasks or life-lies in terms of good and evil. It is not morals or good and evil that we should be discussing, but the issue of courage.

YOUTH: Courage again!

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. Even if you are avoiding your life tasks and clinging to your life-lies, it isn't because you are steeped in evil. It is not an issue to be condemned from a moralistic standpoint. It is only an issue of courage.

From the Psychology of Possession to the Psychology of Practice

YOUTH: So in the end what you're talking about is courage? That reminds me, last time you said that Adlerian psychology is a "psychology of courage."

PHILOSOPHER: I will add to that by saying that Adlerian psychology is not a "psychology of possession" but a "psychology of use."

YOUTH: So it's that statement: "It's not what one is born with but what use one makes of that equipment."

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. Thank you for remembering it. Freudian etiology is a psychology of possession, and eventually it arrives at determinism. Adlerian psychology, on the other hand, is a psychology of use, and it is you who decides it.

YOUTH: Adlerian psychology is a psychology of courage, and at the same time it is a psychology of use . . .

PHILOSOPHER: We humans are not so fragile as to simply be at the mercy of etiological (cause-and-effect) traumas. From the standpoint of teleology, we choose our lives and our lifestyles ourselves. We have the power to do that.

YOUTH: But, honestly, I do not have the confidence to overcome my inferiority complex. And you might say that that's a life-lie, but I probably won't ever be able to break free from the inferiority complex.

PHILOSOPHER: Why don't you think so?

YOUTH: Maybe what you are saying is right. Actually, I'm sure it is, and courage really is what I am lacking. I can accept the life-lie as well. I am scared of interacting with people. I don't want to get hurt in interpersonal relationships, and I want to put off my life tasks. That's why I have all these excuses ready. Yes, it's exactly as you say. But isn't what you are talking about a kind of spiritualism? All you're really saying is, "You've lost your courage, you've got to pluck up your courage." It's no different from the silly instructor who thinks he's giving you advice when he comes up and slaps you on the shoulder and says, "Cheer up." Even though the reason I'm not doing well is because I can't just cheer up!

PHILOSOPHER: So what you are saying is that you would like me to suggest some specific steps?

YOUTH: Yes, please. I am a human being. I am not a machine. I've been told that I'm all out of courage, but I can't just get a refill of courage as if I were filling up my tank with fuel.

PHILOSOPHER: All right. But we've gone quite late again tonight, so let's continue this next time.

YOUTH: You aren't running away from it, right?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course not. Next time, we will probably discuss freedom.

YOUTH: Not courage?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, it will be a discussion of freedom, which is essential when talking about courage. Please give some thought to the matter of what freedom is.

YOUTH: What freedom is . . . Fine. I am looking forward to next time.