

THE FIRST NIGHT:

Deny Trauma

The young man entered the study and sat slouched in a chair. Why was he so determined to reject the philosopher's theories? His reasons were abundantly clear. He lacked self-confidence and, ever since childhood, this had been compounded by deep-seated feelings of inferiority with regard to his personal and academic backgrounds, as well as his physical appearance. Perhaps, as a result, he tended to be excessively self-conscious when people looked at him. Mostly, he seemed incapable of truly appreciating other people's happiness and was constantly pitying himself. To him, the philosopher's claims were nothing more than the stuff of fantasy.

The Unknown Third Giant

YOUTH: A moment ago, you used the words “another philosophy,” but I’ve heard that your specialty is in Greek philosophy.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, Greek philosophy has been central to my life ever since I was a teenager. The great intellectual figures: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. I am translating a work by Plato at the moment, and I expect to spend the rest of my life studying classical Greek thought.

YOUTH: Well, then what is this “other philosophy”?

PHILOSOPHER: It is a completely new school of psychology that was established by the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is generally referred to as Adlerian psychology.

YOUTH: Huh. I never would have imagined that a specialist in Greek philosophy would be interested in psychology.

PHILOSOPHER: I’m not very familiar with paths taken by other schools of psychology. However, I think it is fair to say that Adlerian psychology is clearly in line with Greek philosophy, and that it is a proper field of study.

YOUTH: I have a passing knowledge of the psychology of Freud and Jung. A fascinating field.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, Freud and Jung are both renowned. Adler was one of the original core members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which was led by

Freud. His ideas were counter to Freud's, and he split from the group and proposed an "individual psychology" based on his own original theories.

YOUTH: Individual psychology? Another odd term. So Adler was a disciple of Freud's?

PHILOSOPHER: No, he was not. That misconception is common; we must dispel it. For one thing, Adler and Freud were relatively close in age, and the relationship they formed as researchers was founded upon equal footing. In this respect, Adler was very different from Jung, who revered Freud as a father figure. Though psychology primarily tends to be associated with Freud and Jung, Adler is recognized throughout the rest of the world, along with Freud and Jung, as one of the three giants in this field.

YOUTH: I see. I should have studied it more.

PHILOSOPHER: I suppose it's only natural you haven't heard of Adler. As he himself said, "There might come a time when one will not remember my name; one might even have forgotten that our school ever existed." Then he went on to say that it didn't matter. The implication being that if his school were forgotten, it would be because his ideas had outgrown the bounds of a single area of scholarship, and become commonplace, and a feeling shared by everyone. For example, Dale Carnegie, who wrote the international bestsellers *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, referred to Adler as "a great psychologist who devoted his life to researching humans and their latent abilities." The influence of Adler's thinking is clearly present throughout his writings. And in Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, much of the content closely resembles Adler's ideas. In other words, rather than being a strict area of scholarship, Adlerian psychology is accepted as a realization, a culmination of truths and of human understanding. Yet Adler's ideas are said to have been a hundred years ahead of their time, and even today we have not managed to fully comprehend them. That is how truly groundbreaking they were.

YOUTH: So your theories are developed not from Greek philosophy initially but from the viewpoint of Adlerian psychology?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that's right.

YOUTH: Okay. There's one more thing I'd like to ask about your basic stance. Are you a philosopher? Or are you a psychologist?

PHILOSOPHER: I am a philosopher, a person who lives philosophy. And, for me, Adlerian psychology is a form of thought that is in line with Greek philosophy, and that *is* philosophy.

YOUTH: All right, then. Let's get started.

Why People Can Change

YOUTH: First, let's plan the points of discussion. You say people can change. Then you take it a step further, saying that everyone can find happiness.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, everyone, without exception.

YOUTH: Let's save the discussion about happiness for later and address change first. Everyone wishes they could change. I know I do, and I'm sure anyone you might stop and ask on the street would agree. But why does everyone feel they want to change? There's only one answer: because they cannot change. If it were easy for people to change, they wouldn't spend so much time wishing they could. No matter how much they wish it, people cannot change. And that's why there are always so many people getting taken in by new religions and dubious self-help seminars and any preaching on how everyone can change. Am I wrong?

PHILOSOPHER: Well, in response, I'd ask why you are so adamant that people can't change.

YOUTH: Here's why. I have a friend, a guy, who has shut himself in his room for several years. He wishes he could go out and even thinks he'd like to have a job, if possible. So he wants to change the way he is. I say this as his friend, but I assure you he is a very serious person who could be of great use to society. Except that he's afraid to leave his room. If he takes even a single step outside, he suffers palpitations, and his arms and legs shake. It's a kind of neurosis or panic, I suppose. He wants to change, but he can't.

PHILOSOPHER: What do you think the reason is that he can't go out?

YOUTH: I'm not really sure. It could be because of his relationship with his parents, or because he was bullied at school or work. He might have experienced a kind of trauma from something like that. But then, it could be the opposite—maybe he was too pampered as a child and can't face reality. I just don't know, and I can't pry into his past or his family situation.

PHILOSOPHER: So you are saying there were incidents in your friend's past that became the cause of trauma, or something similar, and as a result he can't go out anymore?

YOUTH: Of course. Before an effect, there's a cause. There is nothing mysterious about that.

PHILOSOPHER: Then perhaps the cause of his not being able to go out anymore lies in the home environment during his childhood. He was abused by his parents and reached adulthood without ever feeling love. That's why he's afraid of interacting with people and why he can't go out. It's feasible, isn't it?

YOUTH: Yes, it's entirely feasible. I'd imagine that would be really challenging.

PHILOSOPHER: And then you say, "Before an effect, there's a cause." Or, in other words, who I am now (the effect) is determined by occurrences in the past (the causes). Do I understand correctly?

YOUTH: You do.

PHILOSOPHER: So if the here and now of everyone in the world is due to their past incidents, according to you, wouldn't things turn out very strangely? Don't you see? Everyone who has grown up abused by his or her parents would have to suffer the same effects as your friend and become a recluse, or the whole idea just doesn't hold water. That is, if the past actually determines the present, and the causes control the effects.

YOUTH: What, exactly, are you getting at?

PHILOSOPHER: If we focus only on past causes and try to explain things solely through cause and effect, we end up with “determinism.” Because what this says is that our present and our future have already been decided by past occurrences, and are unalterable. Am I wrong?

YOUTH: So you’re saying that the past doesn’t matter?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that is the standpoint of Adlerian psychology.

YOUTH: I see. The points of conflict seem a bit clearer. But look, if we go by your version, wouldn’t that ultimately mean that there’s no reason my friend can’t go out anymore? Because you’re saying that past incidents don’t matter. I’m sorry, but that’s completely out of the question. There has to be some reason behind his seclusion. There has to be, or there’d be no explanation!

PHILOSOPHER: Indeed, there would be no explanation. So in Adlerian psychology, we do not think about past “causes” but rather about present “goals.”

YOUTH: Present goals?

PHILOSOPHER: Your friend is insecure, so he can’t go out. Think about it the other way around. He doesn’t want to go out, so he’s creating a state of anxiety.

YOUTH: Huh?

PHILOSOPHER: Think about it this way. Your friend had the goal of not going out beforehand, and he’s been manufacturing a state of anxiety and fear as a means to achieve that goal. In Adlerian psychology, this is called “teleology.”

YOUTH: You’re joking! My friend has imagined his anxiety and fear? So would you go so far as saying that my friend is just pretending to be sick?

PHILOSOPHER: He is not pretending to be sick. The anxiety and fear your friend is feeling are real. On occasion, he might also suffer from migraines and violent

stomach cramps. However, these too are symptoms that he has created in order to achieve the goal of not going out.

YOUTH: That's not true! No way! That's too depressing!

PHILOSOPHER: No. This is the difference between etiology (the study of causation) and teleology (the study of the purpose of a given phenomenon, rather than its cause). Everything you have been telling me is based in etiology. As long as we stay in etiology, we will not take a single step forward.

Trauma Does Not Exist

YOUTH: If you are going to state things so forcibly, I'd like a thorough explanation. To begin with, what is the difference you refer to between etiology and teleology?

PHILOSOPHER: Suppose you've got a cold with a high fever, and you go to see the doctor. Then, suppose the doctor says the reason for your sickness is that yesterday, when you went out, you weren't dressed properly, and that's why you caught a cold. Now, would you be satisfied with that?

YOUTH: Of course I wouldn't. It wouldn't matter to me what the reason was—the way I was dressed or because it was raining or whatever. It's the symptoms, the fact that I'm suffering with a high fever now that would matter to me. If he's a doctor, I'd need him to treat me by prescribing medicine, giving shots, or taking whatever specialized measures are necessary.

PHILOSOPHER: Yet those who take an etiological stance, including most counselors and psychiatrists, would argue that what you were suffering from stemmed from such-and-such cause in the past, and would then end up just consoling you by saying, "So you see, it's not your fault." The argument concerning so-called traumas is typical of etiology.

YOUTH: Wait a minute! Are you denying the existence of trauma altogether?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, I am. Adamantly.

YOUTH: What! Aren't you, or I guess I should say Adler, an authority on psychology?

PHILOSOPHER: In Adlerian psychology, trauma is definitively denied. This was a very new and revolutionary point. Certainly, the Freudian view of trauma is fascinating. Freud's idea is that a person's psychic wounds (traumas) cause his or her present unhappiness. When you treat a person's life as a vast narrative, there is an easily understandable causality and sense of dramatic development that creates strong impressions and is extremely attractive. But Adler, in denial of the trauma argument, states the following: "No experience is in itself a cause of our success or failure. We do not suffer from the shock of our experiences—the so-called trauma—but instead we make out of them whatever suits our purposes. We are not determined by our experiences, but the meaning we give them is self-determining."

YOUTH: So we make of them whatever suits our purposes?

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. Focus on the point Adler is making here when he refers to the self being determined not by our experiences themselves, but by *the meaning we give them*. He is not saying that the experience of a horrible calamity or abuse during childhood or other such incidents have no influence on forming a personality; their influences are strong. But the important thing is that nothing is actually determined by those influences. We determine our own lives according to the meaning we give to those past experiences. Your life is not something that someone gives you, but something you choose yourself, and you are the one who decides how you live.

YOUTH: Okay, so you're saying that my friend has shut himself in his room because he actually chooses to live this way? This is serious. Believe me, it is not what he wants. If anything, it's something he was forced to choose because of circumstances. He had no choice other than to become who he is now.

PHILOSOPHER: No. Even supposing that your friend actually thinks, *I can't fit into society because I was abused by my parents*, it's still because it is his *goal* to think that way.

YOUTH: What sort of goal is that?

PHILOSOPHER: The immediate thing would probably be the goal of “not going out.” He is creating anxiety and fear as his reasons to stay inside.

YOUTH: But why doesn’t he want to go out? That’s where the problem resides.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, think of it from the parents’ view. How would you feel if your child were shut up in a room?

YOUTH: I’d be worried, of course. I’d want to help him return to society, I’d want him to be well, and I’d wonder if I’d raised him improperly. I’m sure I would be seriously concerned and try in every way imaginable to help him back to a normal existence.

PHILOSOPHER: *That* is where the problem is.

YOUTH: Where?

PHILOSOPHER: If I stay in my room all the time, without ever going out, my parents will worry. I can get all of my parents’ attention focused on me. They’ll be extremely careful around me and always handle me with kid gloves. On the other hand, if I take even one step out of the house, I’ll just become part of a faceless mass whom no one pays attention to. I’ll be surrounded by people I don’t know and just end up average, or less than average. And no one will take special care of me any longer . . . Such stories about reclusive people are not uncommon.

YOUTH: In that case, following your line of reasoning, my friend has accomplished his goal and is satisfied with his current situation?

PHILOSOPHER: I doubt he’s satisfied, and I’m sure he’s not happy either. But there is no doubt that he is also taking action in line with his goal. This is not something that is unique to your friend. Every one of us is living in line with some goal. That is what teleology tells us.

YOUTH: No way. I reject that as completely unacceptable. Look, my friend is—

PHILOSOPHER: Listen, this discussion won't go anywhere if we just keep talking about your friend. It will turn into a trial in absentia, and that would be hopeless. Let's use another example.

YOUTH: Well, how about this one? It's my own story about something I experienced yesterday.

PHILOSOPHER: Oh? I'm all ears.

People Fabricate Anger

YOUTH: Yesterday afternoon, I was reading a book in a coffee shop when a waiter passed by and spilled coffee on my jacket. I'd just bought it and it's my nicest piece of clothing. I couldn't help it, I just blew my top. I yelled at him at the top of my lungs. I'm not normally the type of person who speaks loudly in public places. But yesterday, the shop was ringing with the sound of my shouting because I flew into a rage and forgot what I was doing. So how about that? Is there any room for a goal to be involved here? No matter how you look at it, isn't this behavior that originates from a cause?

PHILOSOPHER: So you were stimulated by the emotion of anger and ended up shouting. Though you are normally mild-mannered, you couldn't resist being angry. It was an unavoidable occurrence, and you couldn't do anything about it. Is that what you are saying?

YOUTH: Yes, because it happened so suddenly. The words just came out of my mouth before I had time to think.

PHILOSOPHER: Then suppose you happened to have had a knife on you yesterday, and when you blew up you got carried away and stabbed him. Would you still be able to justify that by saying, "It was an unavoidable occurrence, and I couldn't do anything about it"?

YOUTH: That . . . Come on, that's an extreme argument!

PHILOSOPHER: It is not an extreme argument. If we proceed with your reasoning, any offense committed in anger can be blamed on anger and will no longer be

the responsibility of the person because, essentially, you are saying that people cannot control their emotions.

YOUTH: Well, how do you explain my anger, then?

PHILOSOPHER: That's easy. You did not fly into a rage and then start shouting. It is solely that you got angry so that you could shout. In other words, in order to fulfill the goal of shouting, you created the emotion of anger.

YOUTH: What do you mean?

PHILOSOPHER: The goal of shouting came before anything else. That is to say, by shouting, you wanted to make the waiter submit to you and listen to what you had to say. As a means to do that, you fabricated the emotion of anger.

YOUTH: I fabricated it? You've got to be joking!

PHILOSOPHER: Then why did you raise your voice?

YOUTH: As I said before, I blew my top. I was deeply frustrated.

PHILOSOPHER: No. You could have explained matters without raising your voice, and the waiter would most likely have given you a sincere apology, wiped your jacket with a clean cloth, and taken other appropriate measures. He might have even arranged for it to be dry-cleaned. And somewhere in your mind, you were anticipating that he might do these things but, even so, you shouted. The procedure of explaining things in normal words felt like too much trouble, and you tried to get out of that and make this unresisting person submit to you. The tool you used to do this was the emotion of anger.

YOUTH: No way. You can't fool me. I manufactured anger in order to make him submit to me? I swear to you, there wasn't even a second to think of such a thing. I didn't think it over and then get angry. Anger is a more impulsive emotion.

PHILOSOPHER: That's right, anger is an instantaneous emotion. Now listen, I have a story. One day, a mother and daughter were quarreling loudly. Then, suddenly, the telephone rang. "Hello?" The mother picked up the receiver hurriedly, her voice still thick with anger. The caller was her daughter's homeroom teacher. As soon as the mother realized who was phoning, the tone of her voice changed and she became very polite. Then, for the next five minutes or so, she carried on a conversation in her best telephone voice. Once she hung up, in a moment, her expression changed again and she went straight back to yelling at her daughter.

YOUTH: Well, that's not a particularly unusual story.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't you see? In a word, anger is a tool that can be taken out as needed. It can be put away the moment the phone rings, and pulled out again after one hangs up. The mother isn't yelling in anger she cannot control. She is simply using the anger to overpower her daughter with a loud voice and thereby assert her opinions.

YOUTH: So anger is a means to achieve a goal?

PHILOSOPHER: That is what teleology says.

YOUTH: Ah, I see now. Under that gentle-looking mask you wear, you're terribly nihilistic! Whether we're talking about anger or my reclusive friend, all your insights are stuffed with feelings of distrust for human beings!

How to Live Without Being Controlled by the Past

PHILOSOPHER: How am I being nihilistic?

YOUTH: Think about it. Simply put, you deny human emotion. You say that emotions are nothing more than tools, that they're just the means for achieving goals. But listen. If you deny emotion, you're upholding a view that tries to deny our humanity, too. Because it's our emotions, and the fact that we are swayed by all sorts of feelings, that make us human. If emotions are denied, humans will be nothing more than poor excuses for machines. If that isn't nihilism, then what is?

PHILOSOPHER: I am not denying that emotion exists. Everyone has emotions. That goes without saying. But if you are going to tell me that people are beings who can't resist emotion, I'd argue against that. Adlerian psychology is a form of thought, a philosophy that is diametrically opposed to nihilism. We are not controlled by emotion. In this sense, while it shows that people are not controlled by emotion, additionally it shows that we are not controlled by the past.

YOUTH: So people are not controlled either by emotion or the past?

PHILOSOPHER: Okay, for example, suppose there is someone whose parents had divorced in his past. Isn't this something objective, the same as the well water that is always sixty degrees? But then, does that divorce feel cold or does it feel warm? So this is a "now" thing, a subjective thing. Regardless of what may have

happened in the past, it is the meaning that is attributed to it that determines the way someone's present will be.

YOUTH: The question isn't "What happened?" but "How was it resolved?"

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. We can't go back to the past in a time machine. We can't turn back the hands of time. If you end up staying in etiology, you will be bound by the past and never be able to find happiness.

YOUTH: That's right! We can't change the past, and that's precisely why life is so hard.

PHILOSOPHER: Life isn't just hard. If the past determined everything and couldn't be changed, we who are living today would no longer be able to take effective steps forward in our lives. What would happen as a result? We would end up with the kind of nihilism and pessimism that loses hope in the world and gives up on life. The Freudian etiology that is typified by the trauma argument is determinism in a different form, and it is the road to nihilism. Are you going to accept values like that?

YOUTH: I don't want to accept them, but the past is so powerful.

PHILOSOPHER: Think of the possibilities. If one assumes that people are beings who can change, a set of values based on etiology becomes untenable, and one is compelled to take the position of teleology as a matter of course.

YOUTH: So you are saying that one should always take the "people can change" premise?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. And please understand, it is Freudian etiology that denies our free will and treats humans like machines.



The young man paused and glanced around the philosopher's study. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled the walls, and on a small wooden desk lay a fountain pen and what appeared to be a partially written manuscript. "People are not driven by past causes but move toward goals that they themselves set"—that was the philosopher's claim. The teleology he espoused was an idea that overturned at the root the causality of respectable psychology, and the young man found that impossible to accept. So from which standpoint should he start to argue it? The youth took a deep breath.

Socrates and Adler

YOUTH: All right. Let me tell you about another friend of mine, a man named Y. He's the kind of person who has always had a bright personality and talks easily to anyone. He's like a sunflower—everyone loves him, and people smile whenever he's around. In contrast, I am someone who has never had an easy time socially and who's kind of warped in various ways. Now, you are claiming that people can change through Adler's teleology?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. You and I and everyone can change.

YOUTH: Then, do you think I could become someone like Y? From the bottom of my heart, I really wish I could be like him.

PHILOSOPHER: At this point, I'd have to say that's totally out of the question.

YOUTH: Aha! Now you're showing your true colors! So are you going to retract your theory?

PHILOSOPHER: No, I am not. Unfortunately, you have almost no understanding of Adlerian psychology yet. The first step to change is knowing.

YOUTH: So if I can understand just something about Adlerian psychology, can I become a person like Y?

PHILOSOPHER: Why are you rushing for answers? You should arrive at answers on your own, not rely upon what you get from someone else. Answers from others are nothing more than stopgap measures; they're of no value. Take Socrates, who left not one book actually written by himself. He spent his days

having public debates with the citizens of Athens, especially the young, and it was his disciple, Plato, who put his philosophy into writing for future generations. Adler, too, showed little interest in literary activities, preferring to engage in personal dialogue at cafés in Vienna, and hold small discussion groups. He was definitely not an armchair intellectual.

YOUTH: So Socrates and Adler both conveyed their ideas by dialogue?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. All your doubts will be dispelled through this dialogue. And you will begin to change. Not by my words, but by your own doing. I do not want to take away that valuable process of arriving at answers through dialogue.

YOUTH: So are we going to try and reenact the kind of dialogue that Socrates and Adler carried out? In this little study?

PHILOSOPHER: Isn't that good enough for you?

YOUTH: That's what I'm hoping to find out! So let's take it as far as we can, until either you retract your theory or I bow before you.

Are You Okay Just As You Are?

PHILOSOPHER: Okay, let's go back to your query. So you'd like to be a more upbeat person, like Y?

YOUTH: But you just rejected that and said it was out of the question. Well, I guess that's just how it is. I was just saying that to give you a hard time—I know myself well enough. I could never be someone like that.

PHILOSOPHER: Why not?

YOUTH: It's obvious. Because we have different personalities, or I guess you could say dispositions.

PHILOSOPHER: Hmm.

YOUTH: You, for instance, live surrounded by all these books. You read a new book and gain new knowledge. Basically, you keep accumulating knowledge. The more you read, the more your knowledge increases. You find new concepts of value, and it seems to you that they change you. Look, I hate to break it to you, but no matter how much knowledge you gain, your disposition or personality isn't going to basically change. If your base gets skewed, all you've learned will be useless. Yes, all the knowledge you've acquired will come crashing down around you, and then the next thing you know, you'll be back to where you started! And the same goes for Adler's ideas. No matter how many facts I may try to accumulate about him, they're not going to have any effect on my personality. Knowledge just gets piled up as knowledge, until sooner or later it's discarded.

PHILOSOPHER: Then let me ask you this. Why do you think you want to be like Y? I guess you just want to be a different person, whether it's Y or someone else. But what is the goal of that?

YOUTH: You're talking about goals again? As I said earlier, it's just that I admire him and I think I'd be happier if I were like him.

PHILOSOPHER: You think you'd be happier if you were like him. Which means that you are not happy now, right?

YOUTH: What?

PHILOSOPHER: Right now, you are unable to feel really happy. This is because you have not learned to love yourself. And to try to love yourself, you are wishing to be reborn as a different person. You're hoping to become like Y and throw away who you are now. Correct?

YOUTH: Yes, I guess that's right! Let's face it: I hate myself! I, the one who's doing this playing around with old-fashioned philosophical discourse, and who just can't help doing this sort of thing—yes, I really hate myself.

PHILOSOPHER: That's all right. If you were to ask around for people who say they like themselves, you'd be hard-pressed to find someone who'd puff up his or her chest with pride and say, "Yes, I like myself."

YOUTH: How about you? Do you like yourself?

PHILOSOPHER: At the very least, I do not think I would like to be a different person and I accept who I am.

YOUTH: You accept who you are?

PHILOSOPHER: Look, no matter how much you want to be Y, you cannot be reborn as him. You are not Y. It's okay for you to be you. However, I am not saying it's fine to be "just as you are." If you are unable to really feel happy, then

it's clear that things aren't right just as they are. You've got to put one foot in front of the other, and not stop.

YOUTH: That's a harsh way of putting it, but I get your point. It's clear that I'm not right just the way I am. I've got to move forward.

PHILOSOPHER: To quote Adler again: "The important thing is not what one is born with but what use one makes of that equipment." You want to be Y or someone else because you are utterly focused on what you were born with. Instead, you've got to focus on what you can make of your equipment.

Unhappiness Is Something You Choose for Yourself

YOUTH: No way. That's unreasonable.

PHILOSOPHER: Why is it unreasonable?

YOUTH: Why? Some people are born into affluent circumstances with parents who are nice, and others are born poor with bad parents. Because that's how the world is. And I don't really want to get into this sort of subject, but things aren't equal in the world and differences between race, nationality, and ethnicity remain as deep as ever. It's only natural to focus on what you were born with. All your talk is just academic theory—you're ignoring the real world!

PHILOSOPHER: It is you who is ignoring reality. Does fixating on what you are born with change the reality? We are not replaceable machines. It is not replacement we need but renewal.

YOUTH: To me, replacement and renewal are one and the same. You're avoiding the main point. Look, there is such a thing as unhappiness from birth. Please acknowledge that, first of all.

PHILOSOPHER: I will not acknowledge that.

YOUTH: Why?

PHILOSOPHER: For one thing, right now you are unable to feel real happiness. You find living hard, and even wish you could be reborn as a different person.

But you are unhappy now because you yourself chose being unhappy. Not because you were born under an unlucky star.

YOUTH: I chose to be unhappy? How can I possibly accept that?

PHILOSOPHER: There's nothing extraordinary about it. It's been repeated ever since the classical Greek era. Have you heard the saying "No one desires evil"? It's a proposition generally known as a Socratic paradox.

YOUTH: There's no shortage of people who desire evil, is there? Of course, there are plenty of thieves and murderers, and don't forget all the politicians and officials with their shady deals. It's probably harder to find a truly good, upright person who does not desire evil.

PHILOSOPHER: Without question, there is no shortage of behavior that is evil. But no one, not even the most hardened criminal, becomes involved in crime purely out of a desire to engage in evil acts. Every criminal has an internal justification for getting involved in crime. A dispute over money leads someone to engage in murder, for instance. To the perpetrator, it is something for which there is a justification and which can be restated as an accomplishment of "good." Of course, this is not good in a moral sense, but good in the sense of being "of benefit to oneself."

YOUTH: Of benefit to oneself?

PHILOSOPHER: The Greek word for "good" (*agathon*) does not have a moral meaning. It just means "beneficial." Conversely, the word for "evil" (*kakon*) means "not beneficial." Our world is rife with injustices and misdeeds of all kinds, yet there is not one person who desires evil in the purest sense of the word, that is to say something "not beneficial."

YOUTH: What does this have to do with me?

PHILOSOPHER: At some stage in your life, you chose "being unhappy." It is not because you were born into unhappy circumstances or ended up in an unhappy

situation. It's that you judged "being unhappy" to be good for you.

YOUTH: Why? What for?

PHILOSOPHER: How do you justify this? Why did you choose to be unhappy? I have no way of knowing the specific answer or details. Perhaps it will become clearer as we debate this.

YOUTH: You are really trying to make a fool of me. You think this passes for philosophy? I do not accept this at all.



In spite of himself, the young man got up and glared at the philosopher. *I chose an unhappy life? Because it was good for me? What an absurd argument! Why is he going to such lengths to ridicule me? What did I do wrong? I'll dismantle his argument, no matter what it takes. I'll make him kneel before me.* The young man's face flushed with excitement.

People Always Choose Not to Change

PHILOSOPHER: Sit down. As things stand, it's only natural that our views clash. I will now give a simple explanation as to the manner in which humans are understood in Adlerian psychology.

YOUTH: Okay, but please be brief.

PHILOSOPHER: Earlier you said that any person's disposition or personality cannot be changed. In Adlerian psychology, we describe personality and disposition with the word "lifestyle."

YOUTH: Lifestyle?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. Lifestyle is the tendencies of thought and action in life.

YOUTH: Tendencies of thought and action?

PHILOSOPHER: How one sees the world. And how one sees oneself. Think of lifestyle as a concept bringing together these ways of finding meaning. In a narrow sense, lifestyle could be defined as someone's personality; taken more broadly, it is a word that encompasses the worldview of that person and his or her outlook on life.

YOUTH: A person's view of the world?

PHILOSOPHER: Say there's someone who worries about himself and says, "I am a pessimist." One could rephrase that to instead say, "I have a pessimistic view of the world." You could consider that the issue is not personality but rather the

view of the world. It seems that the word “personality” is nuanced and suggests being unchangeable. But if we’re talking about a view of the world, well, then, that should be possible to alter.

YOUTH: Hmm. This is kind of confusing. When you speak of a lifestyle, do you mean a way of living?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you could put it that way. To be a little more accurate, it is the way one’s life should be. You probably think of disposition or personality as something with which you are endowed, without any connection to your will. In Adlerian psychology, however, lifestyle is thought of as something that you choose for yourself.

YOUTH: That you choose for yourself?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, exactly. You choose your lifestyle.

YOUTH: So not only did I choose to be unhappy, but I even went so far as to choose this warped personality, too?

PHILOSOPHER: Absolutely.

YOUTH: Ha! Now you’re really pushing it. When I became aware, I already had this personality. I certainly don’t have any recollection of having chosen it. But it’s the same for you, isn’t it? Being able to choose one’s own personality at will . . . Now that sounds like you’re talking about robots, not people.

PHILOSOPHER: Of course, you did not consciously choose “this kind of self.” Your first choice was probably unconscious, combined with external factors you have referred to—that is, race, nationality, culture, and home environment. These certainly had a significant influence on that choice. Nevertheless, it is you who chose “this kind of self.”

YOUTH: I don’t get what you’re saying. How on earth could I have chosen it?

PHILOSOPHER: Adlerian psychology's view is that it happens around the age of ten.

YOUTH: Well, for argument's sake—and now I'm really going out on a limb—say that when I was ten, I unconsciously made this choice of lifestyle or whatever. Would that even matter? You can call it personality or disposition or lifestyle, but, regardless, I had already become “this kind of self.” The state of things doesn't change at all.

PHILOSOPHER: That is not true. If your lifestyle is not something that you were naturally born with, but something you chose yourself, then it must be possible to choose it over again.

YOUTH: Now you're saying I can choose it all over?

PHILOSOPHER: Maybe you haven't been aware of your lifestyle until now, and maybe you haven't been aware of the concept of lifestyle either. Of course, no one can choose his or her own birth. Being born in this country, in this era, and with these parents are things you did not choose. And all these things have a great deal of influence. You'll probably face disappointment and start looking at other people and feeling, *I wish I'd been born in their circumstances*. But you can't let it end there. The issue is not the past, but here, in the present. And now you've learned about lifestyle. But what you do with it from here on is your responsibility. Whether you go on choosing the lifestyle you've had up till now, or you choose a new lifestyle altogether, it's entirely up to you.

YOUTH: Then how do I choose again? You're telling me, “You chose that lifestyle yourself, so go ahead and select a new one instantly,” but there's no way I can just change on the spot!

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you *can*. People can change at any time, regardless of the environments they are in. You are unable to change only because you are making the decision not to.

YOUTH: What do you mean, exactly?

PHILOSOPHER: People are constantly selecting their lifestyles. Right now, while we are having this tête-à-tête, we are selecting ours. You describe yourself as an unhappy person. You say that you want to change right this minute. You even claim that you want to be reborn as a different person. After all that, then why are you still unable to change? It is because you are making the persistent decision not to change your lifestyle.

YOUTH: No, don't you see that's completely illogical? I do want to change; that is my sincere wish. So how could I be making the decision not to?

PHILOSOPHER: Although there are some small inconveniences and limitations, you probably think that the lifestyle you have now is the most practical one, and that it's easier to leave things as they are. If you stay just like this, experience enables you to respond properly to events as they occur, while guessing the results of one's actions. You could say it's like driving your old, familiar car. It might rattle a bit, but one can take that into account and maneuver easily. On the other hand, if one chooses a new lifestyle, no one can predict what might happen to the new self, or have any idea how to deal with events as they arise. It will be hard to see ahead to the future, and life will be filled with anxiety. A more painful and unhappy life might lie ahead. Simply put, people have various complaints about things, but it's easier and more secure to be just the way one is.

YOUTH: One wants to change, but changing is scary?

PHILOSOPHER: When we try to change our lifestyles, we put our great courage to the test. There is the anxiety generated by changing, and the disappointment attendant to not changing. I am sure you have selected the latter.

YOUTH: Wait . . . Just now, you used the word "courage."

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. Adlerian psychology is a psychology of courage. Your unhappiness cannot be blamed on your past or your environment. And it isn't

that you lack competence. You just lack courage. One might say you are lacking in the courage to be happy.

Your Life Is Decided Here and Now

YOUTH: The courage to be happy, huh?

PHILOSOPHER: Do you need further explanation?

YOUTH: No, hold on. This is getting confusing. First, you tell me that the world is a simple place. That it seems complicated only because of me, and that my subjective view is making it that way. And also, that life seems complicated just because I make it complicated, all of which is what makes it difficult for me to live happily. Then you say that one should take the stance of teleology, as opposed to Freudian etiology—that one must not search for causes in one's past, and should deny trauma. You say that people act to achieve some goal or other, instead of being creatures who are driven by causes in their past. Right?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes.

YOUTH: Furthermore, as the major premise of teleology, you say that people can change. That people are always selecting their own lifestyles.

PHILOSOPHER: That is correct.

YOUTH: So I am unable to change because I myself keep repeatedly making the decision not to change. I don't have enough courage to choose a new lifestyle. In other words, I do not have enough courage to be happy, and that's why I'm unhappy. Have I got anything wrong?

PHILOSOPHER: No, you haven't.

YOUTH: Okay, in that case, my question is, What are the real measures I should take? What do I need to do to change my life? You haven't explained all that yet.

PHILOSOPHER: You are right. What you should do now is make a decision to stop your current lifestyle. For instance, earlier you said, "If only I could be someone like Y, I'd be happy." As long as you live that way, in the realm of the possibility of "If only such and such were the case," you will never be able to change. Because saying "If only I could be like Y" is an excuse to yourself for not changing.

YOUTH: An excuse not to change?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. I have a young friend who dreams of becoming a novelist, but he never seems to be able to complete his work. According to him, his job keeps him too busy, and he can never find enough time to write novels, and that's why he can't complete work and enter it for writing awards. But is that the real reason? No! It's actually that he wants to leave the possibility of "I can do it if I try" open, by not committing to anything. He doesn't want to expose his work to criticism, and he certainly doesn't want to face the reality that he might produce an inferior piece of writing and face rejection. He wants to live inside that realm of possibilities, where he can say that he could do it if he only had the time, or that he could write if he just had the proper environment, and that he really does have the talent for it. In another five or ten years, he will probably start using other excuses like "I'm not young anymore" or "I've got a family to think about now."

YOUTH: I can relate all too well to how he must feel.

PHILOSOPHER: He should just enter his writing for an award, and if he gets rejected, so be it. If he did, he might grow, or discover that he should pursue something different. Either way, he would be able to move on. That is what changing your current lifestyle is about. He won't get anywhere by not submitting anything.

YOUTH: But maybe his dreams will be shattered.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, I wonder. Having simple tasks—things that should be done—while continually coming up with various reasons why one can't do them sounds like a hard way to live, doesn't it? So in the case of my friend who dreams of becoming a novelist, it is clearly the "I," or the "self," that is making life complicated and too difficult to live happily.

YOUTH: But . . . That's harsh. Your philosophy is too tough!

PHILOSOPHER: Indeed, it is strong medicine.

YOUTH: Strong medicine! Yes, I agree.

PHILOSOPHER: But if you change your lifestyle—the way of giving meaning to the world and yourself—then both your way of interacting with the world and your behavior will have to change as well. Do not forget this point: One will have to change. You, just as you are, have to choose your lifestyle. It might seem hard, but it is really quite simple.

YOUTH: According to you, there's no such thing as trauma, and environment doesn't matter either. It's all just baggage, and my unhappiness is my own fault, right? I'm starting to feel I'm being criticized for everything I've ever been and done!

PHILOSOPHER: No, you are not being criticized. Rather, as Adler's teleology tells us, "No matter what has occurred in your life up to this point, it should have no bearing at all on how you live from now on." That you, living in the here and now, are the one who determines your own life.

YOUTH: My life is determined at this exact point?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, because the past does not exist.

YOUTH: All right. Well, I don't agree with your theories one hundred percent. There are many points I'm not convinced about and that I would argue against. At the same time, your theories are worth further consideration, and I'm definitely interested in learning more about Adlerian psychology. I think I've had enough for tonight, but I hope you won't mind if I come again next week. If I don't take a break, I think my head might burst.

PHILOSOPHER: I'm sure you need some time on your own to think things over. I am always here, so you can visit whenever you like. I enjoyed it. Thank you. Let's talk again.

YOUTH: Great! One last thing, if I may. Our discussion today was long and got pretty intense, and I guess I spoke rather rudely. For that, I would like to apologize.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't worry about it. You should read Plato's dialogues. The conduct and language of the disciples of Socrates are surprisingly loose. That's the way a dialogue is supposed to be.