

THE THIRD NIGHT:

Discard Other People's Tasks

Two anguished weeks later, the youth paid another visit to the philosopher's study. *What is freedom? Why can't people be free? Why can't I be free? What is the true nature of whatever it is that is constraining me?* The assignment he had been given was weighing heavily on him, but it seemed impossible to find a convincing answer. The more he thought about it, the more the youth began to notice his own lack of freedom.

Deny the Desire for Recognition

YOUTH: So you said that today we would discuss freedom.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. Did you have any time to think about what freedom is?

YOUTH: Yes, actually. I thought about it at great length.

PHILOSOPHER: And did you arrive at any conclusions?

YOUTH: Well, I couldn't find any answers. But I did find this—it's not my own idea, but something I came across at the library, a line from a novel by Dostoevsky: "Money is coined freedom." What do you think? Isn't "coined freedom" a rather refreshing term? But seriously, I was fascinated to find this one line that drove right to the heart of this thing called money.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. Certainly, if one were to speak in a very general sense of the true nature of that which is brought about by money, one might say that is freedom. It is an astute observation, to be sure. But you wouldn't go so far as to say that "freedom therefore is money," would you?

YOUTH: It's exactly as you say. There probably is freedom that can be gained by way of money. And I'm sure that freedom is greater than we imagine. Because, in reality, all the necessities of life are dealt with through financial transactions. Does it follow, then, that if one possesses great wealth, one can be free? I don't believe that is the case; I would certainly like to believe that it is not the case, and that human values and human happiness cannot be bought with money.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, say for the moment that you have obtained financial freedom. And then, though you have gained great wealth, you have not found happiness. At that time, what problems and privations would remain for you?

YOUTH: It would be the interpersonal relationships you have been mentioning. I have thought deeply about this matter. For instance, you might be blessed by great wealth but not have anyone who loves you; you have no comrades whom you could call friends, and you are not liked by anyone. This is a great misfortune. Another thing I can't get out of my head is the word "bonds." Every one of us is tangled up and writhing in these strings that we call bonds. Having to be attached to a person you don't even care for, for example, or to always watch out for your awful boss's mood swings. Imagine, if you could be released from such petty interpersonal relationships, how easy things would be! But no one can really do such a thing. Wherever we go, we are surrounded by other people, and we are social individuals, who exist in our relations to other people. No matter what we do, we cannot escape the strong rope of our interpersonal relationships. I see now that Adler's statement "All problems are interpersonal relationship problems" is a great insight.

PHILOSOPHER: It is a crucial point. Let's dig a little deeper. What is it about our interpersonal relationships that is robbing us of our freedom?

YOUTH: Last time, you spoke about whether one thinks of other people as enemies or as comrades. You said that if one becomes able to see others as one's comrades, one's way of looking at the world should change as well. That certainly makes sense. I felt quite convinced the other day when I left here. But then what happened? I gave the matter some careful thought, and I noticed that there are aspects of interpersonal relationships that can't be completely explained.

PHILOSOPHER: Like what?

YOUTH: The most obvious one is the existence of parents. I could never think of parents as enemies. During my childhood, especially, they were my greatest

guardians who raised and protected me. In that regard, I am sincerely grateful. Still, my parents were strict people. I told you about this last time, that they always compared me to my older brother and refused to recognize me. And they have constantly made comments about my life, saying I should study more, not make friends with people like this or that, get into this university at the very least, get this kind of job, and so on. Their demands put a lot of pressure on me and were certainly bonds.

PHILOSOPHER: Then, what did you end up doing?

YOUTH: It seems to me that until I started university, I was never able to ignore my parents' intentions. I was anxious, which was unpleasant, but the fact of the matter is that my wishes always seemed to end up overlapping with my parents'. My place of work I chose myself, however.

PHILOSOPHER: Now that you mention it, I haven't heard about that yet. What kind of work do you do?

YOUTH: I'm now working as a librarian at a university library. My parents wanted me to take on my father's printing plant, like my brother did. Because of this, ever since I started my current job, our relationship has been somewhat strained. If they weren't my parents, and instead were enemy-like presences in my life, I probably wouldn't have minded at all. Because no matter how much they might have tried to interfere, I could always just ignore them. But as I've said, parents to me are not enemies. Whether or not they are comrades is another matter, but, at the very least, they are not what I would call enemies. It's a relationship that is much too close to be able to just ignore their intentions.

PHILOSOPHER: When you decided which university you would go to in line with your parents' wishes, what sort of emotion did you feel with regard to your parents?

YOUTH: It's complicated. I did have feelings of resentment, but on the other hand there was this sense of relief, too. You know, that I could get them to

recognize me if I went to that school.

PHILOSOPHER: You could get them to recognize you?

YOUTH: Come on, let's stop the roundabout leading questions. I'm sure you know what I'm referring to. It's the so-called desire for recognition. It's interpersonal relationship problems in a nutshell. We human beings live in constant need of recognition from others. It is precisely because the other person is not an abhorrent enemy that one wants recognition from him, isn't it? So yes, that's right; I wanted to be recognized by my parents.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. Let's talk about one of the major premises of Adlerian psychology regarding this matter. Adlerian psychology denies the need to seek recognition from others.

YOUTH: It denies the desire for recognition?

PHILOSOPHER: There is no need to be recognized by others. Actually, one must not seek recognition. This point cannot be overstated.

YOUTH: No way! Isn't desire for recognition a truly universal desire that motivates all human beings?

Do Not Live to Satisfy the Expectations of Others

PHILOSOPHER: Being recognized by others is certainly something to be happy about. But it would be wrong to say that being recognized is absolutely necessary. For what does one seek recognition in the first place? Or, to put it more succinctly, why does one want to be praised by others?

YOUTH: It's simple. It's through being recognized by others that each of us can truly feel we have value. It is through recognition from others that one becomes able to wipe away one's feelings of inferiority. One learns to have confidence in oneself. Yes, it's an issue of value. I think you mentioned it last time: that the feeling of inferiority is an issue of value judgment. It's because I could never get recognition from my parents that I have lived a life tainted by feelings of inferiority.

PHILOSOPHER: Now let's consider a familiar setting. For example, let's say you've been picking up litter around your workplace. The thing is, no one seems to notice at all. Or if they do, no one has given you any appreciation for what you've done, or even said a single word of thanks. Well, will you keep on picking up litter from now on?

YOUTH: That's a difficult situation. I suppose that if no one appreciates what I'm doing, I might stop.

PHILOSOPHER: Why?

YOUTH: Picking up litter is for everyone. If I'm rolling up my sleeves and getting it done, but I don't get a word of thanks? I guess I'd probably lose my motivation.

PHILOSOPHER: This is the danger of the desire for recognition. Why is it that people seek recognition from others? In many cases, it is due to the influence of reward-and-punishment education.

YOUTH: Reward-and-punishment education?

PHILOSOPHER: If one takes appropriate action, one receives praise. If one takes inappropriate action, one receives punishment. Adler was very critical of education by reward and punishment. It leads to mistaken lifestyles in which people think, *If no one is going to praise me, I won't take appropriate action* and *If no one is going to punish me, I'll engage in inappropriate actions, too*. You already have the goal of wanting to be praised when you start picking up litter. And if you aren't praised by anyone, you'll either be indignant or decide that you'll never do such a thing again. Clearly, there's something wrong with this situation.

YOUTH: No! I wish you wouldn't trivialize things. I'm not arguing about education. Wanting to be recognized by people you like, to be accepted by people close to you, is a normal desire.

PHILOSOPHER: You are badly mistaken. Look, we are not living to satisfy other people's expectations.

YOUTH: What do you mean?

PHILOSOPHER: You are not living to satisfy other people's expectations, and neither am I. It is not necessary to satisfy other people's expectations.

YOUTH: That is such a self-serving argument! Are you saying one should think only about oneself and live self-righteously?

PHILOSOPHER: In the teachings of Judaism, one finds a view that goes something like this: If you are not living your life for yourself, then who is going to live it for you? You are living only your own life. When it comes to who you are living it for, of course it's you. And then, if you are not living your life for yourself, who could there be to live it instead of you? Ultimately, we live thinking about "I." There is no reason that we must not think that way.

YOUTH: So you are afflicted by the poison of nihilism, after all. You say that, ultimately, we live thinking about "I"? And that that's okay? What a wretched way of thinking!

PHILOSOPHER: It is not nihilism at all. Rather, it's the opposite. When one seeks recognition from others, and concerns oneself only with how one is judged by others, in the end, one is living other people's lives.

YOUTH: What does that mean?

PHILOSOPHER: Wishing so hard to be recognized will lead to a life of following expectations held by other people who want you to be "this kind of person." In other words, you throw away who you really are and live other people's lives. And please remember this: If you are not living to satisfy other people's expectations, it follows that other people are not living to satisfy your expectations. Someone might not act the way you want him to, but it doesn't do to get angry. That's only natural.

YOUTH: No, it is not! That is an argument that overturns our society from its very foundation. Look, we have the desire for recognition. But in order to receive recognition from others, first we have to recognize others ourselves. It is because one recognizes other people and other systems of values that one is recognized by others. It is through this relationship of mutual recognition that our very society is built. Your argument is an abhorrent, dangerous way of thinking, which will drive human beings into isolation and lead to conflict. It's a diabolical solicitation to needlessly stir up distrust and doubt.

PHILOSOPHER: Ha-ha, you certainly have an interesting vocabulary. There's no need to raise your voice—let's think about this together. One has to get recognition, or one will suffer. If one doesn't get recognition from others and from one's parents, one won't have confidence. Can such a life be healthy? So one could think, *God is watching, so accumulate good deeds*. But that and the nihilist view that "there is no God, so all evil deeds are permitted" are two sides of the same coin. Even supposing that God did not exist, and that we could not gain recognition from God, we would still have to live this life. Indeed, it is in order to overcome the nihilism of a godless world that it is necessary to deny recognition from other people.

YOUTH: I don't care for all this talk about God. Think more straightforwardly and more plainly about the mentality of real, everyday people. What about the desire to be recognized socially, for example? Why does a person want to climb the corporate ladder? Why does a person seek status and fame? It's the wish to be recognized as somebody important by society as a whole—it's the desire for recognition.

PHILOSOPHER: Then, if you get that recognition, would you say that you've really found happiness? Do people who have established their social status truly feel happy?

YOUTH: No, but that's . . .

PHILOSOPHER: When trying to be recognized by others, almost all people treat satisfying other people's expectations as the means to that end. And that is in accordance with the stream of thought of reward-and-punishment education that says one will be praised if one takes appropriate action. If, for example, the main point of your job turns out to be satisfying other people's expectations, then that job is going to be very hard on you. Because you'll always be worried about other people looking at you and fear their judgment, and you are repressing your "I-ness." It might come as a surprise to you, but almost none of my clients who come for counseling are selfish people. Rather, they are suffering

trying to meet the expectations of other people, the expectations of their parents and teachers. So, in a good way, they can't behave in a self-centered fashion.

YOUTH: So I should be selfish?

PHILOSOPHER: Do not behave without regard for others. To understand this, it is necessary to understand the idea in Adlerian psychology known as "separation of tasks."

YOUTH: Separation of tasks? That's a new term. Let's hear about it.



The youth's irritation had reached its peak. *Deny the desire for recognition? Don't satisfy other people's expectations? Live in a more self-centered way?* What on earth was this philosopher saying? Isn't the desire for recognition itself people's greatest motivator for associating with each other and going about the formation of society? The youth wondered, *What if this "separation of tasks" idea doesn't win me over? I won't be able to accept this man, or Adler for that matter, for the rest of my life.*

How to Separate Tasks

PHILOSOPHER: Say there's a child who has a hard time studying. He doesn't pay attention in class, doesn't do his homework, and even leaves his books at school. Now, what would you do if you were his father?

YOUTH: Well, of course, I would try everything I could think of to get him to apply himself. I'd hire tutors and make him go to a study center, even if I had to pull him by the ear to get him there. I'd say that's a parent's duty. And that's actually how I was raised myself. I wasn't allowed to eat dinner until the day's homework was done.

PHILOSOPHER: Then let me ask another question. Did you learn to enjoy studying as a result of being made to do it in such a heavy-handed manner?

YOUTH: Unfortunately, I did not. I just took care of my studies for school and for exams in a routine way.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. All right, I will talk about this from the basic stance of Adlerian psychology. When one is confronted with the task of studying, for instance, in Adlerian psychology we consider it from the perspective of "Whose task is this?"

YOUTH: Whose task?

PHILOSOPHER: Whether the child studies or not. Whether he goes out and plays with his friends or not. Essentially this is the child's task, not the parent's task.

YOUTH: Do you mean that it is something the child is supposed to do?

PHILOSOPHER: Simply put, yes. There would be no point if the parents studied instead of the child, would there?

YOUTH: Well, no, there wouldn't.

PHILOSOPHER: Studying is the child's task. A parent's handling of that by commanding the child to study is, in effect, an act of intruding on another person's task. One is unlikely to avert a collision in this way. We need to think with the perspective of "Whose task is this?" and continually separate one's own tasks from other people's tasks.

YOUTH: How does one go about separating them?

PHILOSOPHER: One does not intrude on other people's tasks. That's all.

YOUTH: That's all?

PHILOSOPHER: In general, all interpersonal relationship troubles are caused by intruding on other people's tasks, or having one's own tasks intruded on. Carrying out the separation of tasks is enough to change one's interpersonal relationships dramatically.

YOUTH: Hmm. I don't really get it. In the first place, how can you tell whose task it is? From my point of view, realistically speaking, getting one's child to study is the duty of the parents. Because almost no child studies just out of enjoyment, and after all is said and done, the parent is the child's guardian.

PHILOSOPHER: There is a simple way to tell whose task it is. Think, *Who ultimately is going to receive the result brought about by the choice that is made?* When the child has made the choice of not studying, ultimately, the result of that decision—not being able to keep up in class or to get into the preferred school, for instance—does not have to be received by the parents. Clearly, it is the child who has to receive it. In other words, studying is the child's task.

YOUTH: No, no. You're completely wrong! The parent, who is more experienced in life and also acts as a guardian, has the responsibility to urge the child to study so such situations do not arise. This is something done for the good of the child and is not an act of intruding. While studying may be the child's task, getting the child to study is the parent's task.

PHILOSOPHER: It's true that one often hears parents today using the phrase "It's for your own good." But they are clearly doing so in order to fulfill their own goals, which could be their appearance in the eyes of society, their need to put on airs, or their desire for control, for example. In other words, it is not "for your own good" but for the parents'. And it is because the child senses this deception that he rebels.

YOUTH: So even if the child hasn't been studying at all, you're saying that, since it's his task, I should just let him be?

PHILOSOPHER: One has to pay attention. Adlerian psychology does not recommend the noninterference approach. Noninterference is the attitude of not knowing, and not even being interested in knowing what the child is doing. Instead, it is by knowing what the child is doing that one protects him. If it's studying that is the issue, one tells the child that that is his task, and one lets him know that one is ready to assist him whenever he has the urge to study. But one must not intrude on the child's task. When no requests are being made, it does not do to meddle in things.

YOUTH: Does this go beyond parent-child relationships?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, of course. In Adlerian psychology counseling, for instance, we do not think of the client's changing or not changing as the task of the counselor.

YOUTH: What are you saying here?

PHILOSOPHER: As a result of having received counseling, what kind of resolution does the client make? To change his lifestyle, or not. This is the client's task, and the counselor cannot intervene.

YOUTH: No way, I can't accept such an irresponsible attitude!

PHILOSOPHER: Naturally, one gives all the assistance one possibly can. But beyond that, one doesn't intrude. Remember the old saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Please think of counseling and all other assistance provided to other people in Adlerian psychology as having that kind of stance. Forcing change while ignoring the person's intentions will only lead to an intense reaction.

YOUTH: The counselor does not change the client's life?

PHILOSOPHER: You are the only one who can change yourself.

Discard Other People's Tasks

YOUTH: Then, what about with shut-ins, for example? I mean, with someone like my friend. Even then, would you say it's the separation of tasks, don't intervene, and it has no connection to the parents?

PHILOSOPHER: Can he break out of the shut-in situation or not? Or, in what way can he break out of it? In principle, this is a task that the person has to resolve himself. It is not for the parents to intervene. Nevertheless, as they are not complete strangers, some form of assistance is probably needed. At this point, the most important thing is whether the child feels he can consult frankly with his parents when he is experiencing a dilemma, and whether they have been building enough of a trust relationship on a regular basis.

YOUTH: Then, suppose your own child had shut himself in, what would you do? Please answer this not as a philosopher but as a parent.

PHILOSOPHER: First, I myself would think, *This is the child's task*. I would try not to intervene in his shut-in situation, and I would refrain from focusing too much attention on it. Then I would send a message to him to the effect that I am ready to assist him whenever he is in need. In that way, the child, having sensed a change in his parent, will have no choice but to make it his own task to think about what he should do. He'll probably come and ask for assistance, and he'll probably try to work some things out on his own.

YOUTH: Could you really manage to be so cut and dried if it were your own child who'd become a shut-in?

PHILOSOPHER: A parent suffering over the relationship with his or her child will tend to think, *My child is my life*. In other words, the parent is taking on the child's task as his or her own and is no longer able to think about anything but the child. When at last the parent notices it, the "I" is already gone from his or her life. However, no matter how much of the burden of the child's task one carries, the child is still an independent individual. Children do not become what their parents want them to become. In their choices of university, place of employment, and partner in marriage, and even in the everyday subtleties of speech and conduct, they do not act according to their parents' wishes. Naturally, the parents will worry about them, and probably want to intervene at times. But, as I said earlier, other people are not living to satisfy your expectations. Though the child is one's own, he or she is not living to satisfy one's expectations as a parent.

YOUTH: So you have to draw the line even with family?

PHILOSOPHER: Actually, with families there is less distance, so it's all the more necessary to consciously separate the tasks.

YOUTH: That doesn't make sense. On the one hand, you're talking about love, and on the other, you're denying it. If you draw the line between yourself and other people that way, you won't be able to believe in anyone anymore!

PHILOSOPHER: Look, the act of believing is also the separation of tasks. You believe in your partner; that is your task. But how that person acts with regard to your expectations and trust is other people's tasks. When you push your wishes without having drawn that line, before you know it you're engaging in stalker-like intervention. Suppose your partner did not act as you had wished. Would you still be able to believe in that person? Would you still be able to love that person? The task of love that Adler speaks of is composed of such questions.

YOUTH: That's difficult! That's very difficult.

PHILOSOPHER: Of course it is. But think about it this way: Intervening in other people's tasks and taking on other people's tasks turns one's life into something heavy and full of hardship. If you are leading a life of worry and suffering—which stems from interpersonal relationships—learn the boundary of “From here on, that is not my task.” And discard other people's tasks. That is the first step toward lightening the load and making life simpler.

How to Rid Yourself of Interpersonal Relationship Problems

YOUTH: I don't know, it just doesn't sit right with me.

PHILOSOPHER: Then let's envision a scene in which your parents are vehemently opposing your choice of place of employment. They were in fact against it, weren't they?

YOUTH: Yes, they were. I wouldn't go so far as saying they were vehemently opposed, but they did make various snide remarks.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, let's exaggerate it and say they were vehemently opposed. Your father was ranting and raving with emotion, and your mother was protesting your decision with tears in her eyes. They absolutely do not approve of you becoming a librarian, and if you will not take on the family business like your brother has, they may very well disown you. But how to come to terms with the emotion of "not approving" is your parents' task, not yours. It is not a problem for you to worry about.

YOUTH: Now wait a minute. Are you saying that it doesn't matter how sad I make my parents feel?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. It doesn't matter.

YOUTH: You've got to be joking! Could there be such a thing as a philosophy that recommends unfilial behavior?

PHILOSOPHER: All you can do with regard to your own life is choose the best path that you believe in. On the other hand, what kind of judgment do other people pass on that choice? That is the task of other people, and is not a matter you can do anything about.

YOUTH: What another person thinks of you—if he or she likes you or dislikes you—that is that person’s task, not mine. Is that what you are saying?

PHILOSOPHER: That is what separating is. You are worried about other people looking at you. You are worried about being judged by other people. That is why you are constantly craving recognition from others. Now, why are you worried about other people looking at you, anyway? Adlerian psychology has an easy answer. You haven’t done the separation of tasks yet. You assume that even things that should be other people’s tasks are your own. Remember the words of the grandmother: “You’re the only one who’s worried how you look.” Her remark drives right to the heart of the separation of tasks. What other people think when they see your face—that is the task of other people and is not something you have any control over.

YOUTH: As theory, I get it. To my reasoning brain, it does make sense. But my emotions can’t keep up with such a high-handed argument.

PHILOSOPHER: Then let’s try another tack. Say there’s a man who’s distressed about the interpersonal relationships at the company where he works. He has a completely irrational boss who yells at him at every opportunity. No matter how hard he tries, his boss doesn’t acknowledge his efforts and never even really listens to what he says.

YOUTH: That sounds exactly like my boss.

PHILOSOPHER: But is being acknowledged by your boss “work” that you should think of as top priority? It isn’t your job to be liked by people at the place you work. Your boss doesn’t like you. And his reasons for not liking you are clearly unreasonable. But in that case, there’s no need for you to get cozy with him.

YOUTH: That sounds right, but the person is my boss, right? I won't get any work done if I'm shunned by my direct superior.

PHILOSOPHER: That is Adler's life-lie again. I can't do my work because I've been shunned by my boss. It's the boss's fault that my work isn't going well. The person who says such things is bringing up the existence of the boss as an excuse for the work that doesn't go well. Much like the female student with the fear of blushing, it's actually that you need the existence of an awful boss. Because then you can say, "If only I didn't have this boss, I could get more work done."

YOUTH: No, you don't know my relationship with my boss! I wish you would stop making arbitrary guesses.

PHILOSOPHER: This is a discussion that is concerned with the fundamentals of Adlerian psychology. If you are angry, nothing will sink in. You think, *I've got that boss, so I can't work*. This is complete etiology. But it's really, *I don't want to work, so I'll create an awful boss, or I don't want to acknowledge my incapable self, so I'll create an awful boss*. That would be the teleological way of looking at it.

YOUTH: That's probably how it'd be framed in your stock teleology approach. But in my case, it's different.

PHILOSOPHER: Then suppose you had done the separation of tasks. How would things be? In other words, no matter how much your boss tries to vent his unreasonable anger at you, that is not your task. The unreasonable emotions are tasks for your boss to deal with himself. There is no need to cozy up to him, or to yield to him to the point of bowing down. You should think, *What I should do is face my own tasks in my own life without lying*.

YOUTH: But that's . . .

PHILOSOPHER: We are all suffering in interpersonal relationships. It might be the relationship with one's parents or one's elder brother, and it might be the interpersonal relationships at one's workplace. Now, last time, you were saying

that you wanted some specific steps. This is what I propose. First, one should ask, "Whose task is this?" Then do the separation of tasks. Calmly delineate up to what point one's own tasks go, and from what point they become another person's tasks. And do not intervene in other people's tasks, or allow even a single person to intervene in one's own tasks. This is a specific and revolutionary viewpoint that is unique to Adlerian psychology and contains the potential to utterly change one's interpersonal relationship problems.

YOUTH: Aha. I am starting to see what you meant when you said that the topic of today's discussion was freedom.

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. We are trying to talk about freedom now.

Cut the Gordian Knot

YOUTH: I am sure that if one could understand the separation of tasks and put it into practice, one's interpersonal relationships would all at once become free. But I still can't accept it.

PHILOSOPHER: Go on. I'm listening.

YOUTH: I think that, in theory, the separation of tasks is entirely right. What other people think of me, or what sort of judgment they pass on me, is the task of other people, and is not something I can do anything about. And I should just do what I have to do in my life without lying. I'd have no problem if you said this is a life truth—that's how right I think it is. But consider this: From an ethical or moral point of view, could it be said to be the right thing to do? That is to say, a way of living that draws boundaries between oneself and others. Because wouldn't you be brushing other people away and saying, "That's intervention!" whenever they were worried about you and asked how you're doing? It seems to me that this is something that treads on the goodwill of others.

PHILOSOPHER: Have you heard of Alexander the Great?

YOUTH: Alexander the Great? Yes, I learned about him in world history.

PHILOSOPHER: He was a Macedonian king who lived in the fourth century before Christ. When he was advancing on the Persian kingdom of Lydia, he learned of a chariot enshrined in the acropolis. The chariot had been secured tightly to a pillar in the temple by Gordias, the former king, and there was a local

legend that said, “He who unravels this knot shall be master of Asia.” It was a tightly wound knot that many men of skill had been certain they could unbind, but no one had succeeded. Now, what do you think Alexander the Great did when he stood before this knot?

YOUTH: Well, didn’t he unravel the legendary knot with ease, and go on to become the ruler of Asia?

PHILOSOPHER: No, that’s not how it happened. As soon as Alexander the Great saw how tight the knot was, he pulled out his sword and sliced it in half with one stroke.

YOUTH: Wow!

PHILOSOPHER: Then, it is said that he declared, “Destiny is not something brought about by legend, but by clearing away with one’s own sword.” He had no use for the power of legend and would forge his destiny with his sword. As you know, he then proceeded to become the great conqueror of all the territories of what is now the Middle East and western Asia. This is the famous anecdote known as the Gordian knot. And so, such intricate knots—the bonds in our interpersonal relationships—are not to be unraveled by conventional methods but must be severed by some completely new approach. Whenever I explain the separation of tasks, I always remember the Gordian knot.

YOUTH: Well, I don’t mean to contradict you, but not everyone can become Alexander the Great. Isn’t it precisely because there was no one else who could have cut the knot that the anecdote portraying it as a heroic deed is still conveyed to this day? It’s exactly the same with the separation of tasks. Even though one knows one can just cut through something with one’s sword, one might find it rather difficult. Because when one presses forward with the separation of tasks, in the end one will have to cut ties with people. One will drive people into isolation. The separation of tasks you speak of completely ignores human emotion! How could one possibly build good interpersonal relationships with that?

PHILOSOPHER: One can build them. The separation of tasks is not the objective for interpersonal relationships. Rather, it is the gateway.

YOUTH: The gateway?

PHILOSOPHER: For instance, when reading a book, if one brings one's face too close to it, one cannot see anything. In the same way, forming good interpersonal relationships requires a certain degree of distance. When the distance gets too small and people become stuck together, it becomes impossible to even speak to each other. But the distance must not be too great, either. Parents who scold their children too much become mentally very distant. When this happens, the child can no longer even consult the parents, and the parents can no longer give the proper assistance. One should be ready to lend a hand when needed but not encroach on the person's territory. It is important to maintain this kind of moderate distance.

YOUTH: Is distance necessary even in the kind of relationship that parents and children have?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. Earlier you said that the separation of tasks is something that treads on the other person's goodwill. That is a notion that is tied to reward. It's the idea that when another person does something for you, you have to do something in return—even if that person does not want anything. Rather than responding to the goodwill, it is just being tied to reward. No matter what sort of appeal the other person might make, you are the only one who decides what you should do.

YOUTH: Reward is at the root of what I am calling "ties"?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. When reward is at the base of an interpersonal relationship, there's a feeling that wells up in one that says, "I gave this much, so you should give me that much back." This is a notion that is quite different from separation of tasks, of course. We must not seek reward, and we must not be tied to it.

YOUTH: Hmm.

PHILOSOPHER: However, there are certainly situations in which it would be easier to intervene in the tasks of another person without doing any separation of tasks—for instance, in a child-raising situation, when a child is having a hard time tying his shoes. For the busy mother, it is certainly faster to tie them than to wait for him to do it himself. But that is an intervention, and it is taking the child's task away from him. And as a result of repeating that intervention, the child will cease to learn anything, and will lose the courage to face his life tasks. As Adler says, "Children who have not been taught to confront challenges will try to avoid all challenges."

YOUTH: But that is such a dry way of thinking.

PHILOSOPHER: When Alexander the Great cut the Gordian knot, there were probably those who felt the same way: that the unraveling of the knot by hand had meaning, and that it was a mistake to cut it with a sword; that Alexander had misunderstood the meaning of the oracle's words. In Adlerian psychology, there are aspects that are antithetical to normal social thinking. It denies etiology, denies trauma, and adopts teleology. It treats people's problems as interpersonal relationship problems. And the not-seeking of recognition and the separation of tasks, too, are probably antithetical to normal social thinking.

YOUTH: It's impossible! I can't do it!

PHILOSOPHER: Why?



The youth was devastated by the separation of tasks that the philosopher had begun describing. When one thought of all one's problems as being in one's interpersonal relationships, the separation of tasks was effective. Just by having this viewpoint, the world would become quite simple. But there was no flesh and blood in it. It gave off no sense of one's

warmth as a person. Could anyone accept such a philosophy? The youth rose from his chair and pleaded loudly.

Desire for Recognition Makes You Unfree

YOUTH: Look, I have been dissatisfied for ages. The adults of the world tell the young people, “Do something you like to do.” And they say it with smiles on their faces as if they might actually be understanding people, as if they were on the side of the young. But it’s all lip service, which comes out only because those young people are complete strangers to them, and the relationship is one that is completely without any kind of responsibility. Then parents and teachers tell us, “Get into that school,” or “Look for a stable occupation,” and this concrete and uninteresting instruction is not merely an intervention. It’s actually that they are trying to fulfill their responsibilities. It’s precisely because we are closely connected to them and they are seriously concerned about our future that they can’t say irresponsible things like, “Do something you like.” I’m sure you’d put on that understanding face too, and say to me, “Please do something you like.” But I won’t believe such a comment from another person! It’s an extremely irresponsible comment, as if one were just brushing a caterpillar off one’s shoulder. And if the world crushed that caterpillar, you would say, “It’s not my task,” and walk away nonchalantly. What separation of tasks, you monster!

PHILOSOPHER: Oh, goodness, you’re getting all bent out of shape. So what you are saying, in other words, is that you want someone to intervene to some extent? That you want another person to decide your path?

YOUTH: Sure, maybe I do! It’s like this: It’s not so difficult to judge what others expect of one, or what kind of role is being demanded of one. Living as one likes, on the other hand, is extremely difficult. What does one want? What does one want to become, and what kind of life does one want to lead? One doesn’t

always get such a concrete idea of things. It would be a grave mistake to think that everyone has clear-cut dreams and objectives. Don't you know that?

PHILOSOPHER: Maybe it is easier to live in such a way as to satisfy other people's expectations. Because one is entrusting one's own life to them. For example, one runs along the tracks that one's parents have laid out. Even if there are a lot of things one might object to, one will not lose one's way as long as one stays on those rails. But if one is deciding one's path oneself, it's only natural that one will get lost at times. One comes up against the wall of "how one should live."

YOUTH: That is why I am looking for recognition from others. You were talking about God earlier, and if we were still living in an era when God was something people believed in, I suppose that "God is watching" might serve as a criterion for self-discipline. If one were recognized by God, maybe one didn't need recognition from others. But that era ended a long time ago. And, in that case, one has no choice but to discipline oneself on the basis that other people are watching. To aspire to be recognized by others and live an honest life. Other people's eyes are my guide.

PHILOSOPHER: Does one choose recognition from others, or does one choose a path of freedom without recognition? It's an important question—let's think about it together. To live one's life trying to gauge other people's feelings and being worried about how they look at you. To live in such a way that others' wishes are granted. There may indeed be signposts to guide you this way, but it is a very unfree way to live. Now, why are you choosing such an unfree way to live? You are using the term "desire for recognition," but what you are really saying is that you don't want to be disliked by anyone.

YOUTH: Who does? There's no one anywhere who'd go so far as to actually want to be disliked.

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. It is true that there is no person who wishes to be disliked. But look at it this way: What should one do to not be disliked by anyone? There is only one answer: It is to constantly gauge other people's

feelings while swearing loyalty to all of them. If there are ten people, one must swear loyalty to all ten. When one does that, for the time being one will have succeeded in not being disliked by anyone. But at this point, there is a great contradiction looming. One swears loyalty to all ten people out of the single-minded desire to not be disliked. This is like a politician who has fallen into populism and begun to make impossible promises and accept responsibilities that are beyond him. Naturally, his lies will come to light before long. He will lose people's trust and turn his own life into one of greater suffering. And, of course, the stress of continual lying has all kinds of consequences. Please grasp this point. If one is living in a such a way as to satisfy other people's expectations, and one is entrusting one's own life to others, that is a way of living in which one is lying to oneself and continuing that lying to include the people around one.

YOUTH: So one should be egocentric and live however one pleases?

PHILOSOPHER: Separating one's tasks is not an egocentric thing. Intervening in other people's tasks is essentially an egocentric way of thinking, however. Parents force their children to study; they meddle in their life and marriage choices. That is nothing other than an egocentric way of thinking.

YOUTH: So the child can just ignore his parents' intentions and live however he pleases?

PHILOSOPHER: There is no reason of any sort that one should not live one's life as one pleases.

YOUTH: Ha-ha! Not only are you a nihilist, you're an anarchist and a hedonist to boot. I'm past being astonished, and now I'm going to start laughing any moment.

PHILOSOPHER: An adult, who has chosen an unfree way to live, on seeing a young person living freely here and now in this moment, criticizes the youth as being hedonistic. Of course, this is a life-lie that comes out so that the adult can

accept his own unfree life. An adult who has chosen real freedom himself will not make such comments and will instead cheer on the will to be free.

YOUTH: All right, so what you are maintaining is that freedom is the issue? Let's get to the main point. You've been using the word "freedom" a lot, but what does freedom mean to you, anyway? How can we be free?

What Real Freedom Is

PHILOSOPHER: Earlier, you acknowledged that you do not want to be disliked by anyone, and said, “There’s no one anywhere who’d go so far as to actually want to be disliked.”

YOUTH: Right.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, I’m the same way. I have no desire to be disliked by other people. I would say that “No one would go so far as to actually want to be disliked” is a sharp insight.

YOUTH: It’s a universal desire!

PHILOSOPHER: Even so, regardless of our efforts, there are people who dislike me and people who dislike you. This, too, is a fact. When you are disliked, or feel that you are being disliked, by someone, what state of mind does it put you in?

YOUTH: Very distressed, to put it simply. I wonder why I’ve come to be disliked, and what I did or said that might have been offensive. I think I should have interacted with the person in a different way, and I just brood and brood over it and am ridden with guilt.

PHILOSOPHER: Not wanting to be disliked by other people. To human beings, this is an entirely natural desire, and an impulse. Kant, the giant of modern philosophy, called this desire “inclination.”

YOUTH: Inclination?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, it is one's instinctive desires, one's impulsive desires. Now, if one were to say that living like a stone tumbling downhill and allowing such inclinations or desires or impulses to take one wherever they will is "freedom," one would be incorrect. To live in such a way is only to be a slave to one's desires and impulses. Real freedom is an attitude akin to pushing up one's tumbling self from below.

YOUTH: Pushing oneself up from below?

PHILOSOPHER: A stone is powerless. Once it has begun to roll downhill, it will continue to roll until released from the natural laws of gravity and inertia. But we are not stones. We are beings who are capable of resisting inclination. We can stop our tumbling selves and climb uphill. The desire for recognition is probably a natural desire. So are you going to keep rolling downhill in order to receive recognition from others? Are you going to wear yourself down like a rolling stone, until everything is smoothed away? When all that is left is a little round ball, would that be "the real I"? It cannot be.

YOUTH: Are you saying that resisting one's instincts and impulses is freedom?

PHILOSOPHER: As I have stated repeatedly, in Adlerian psychology, we think that all problems are interpersonal relationship problems. In other words, we seek release from interpersonal relationships. We seek to be free from interpersonal relationships. However, it is absolutely impossible to live all alone in the universe. In light of what we have discussed until now, the conclusion we reach regarding "What is freedom?" should be clear.

YOUTH: What is it?

PHILOSOPHER: In short, that "freedom is being disliked by other people."

YOUTH: Huh? What was that?

PHILOSOPHER: It's that you are disliked by someone. It is proof that you are exercising your freedom and living in freedom, and a sign that you are living in

accordance with your own principles.

YOUTH: But, but . . .

PHILOSOPHER: It is certainly distressful to be disliked. If possible, one would like to live without being disliked by anyone. One wants to satisfy one's desire for recognition. But conducting oneself in such a way as to not be disliked by anyone is an extremely unfree way of living, and is also impossible. There is a cost incurred when one wants to exercise one's freedom. And the cost of freedom in interpersonal relationships is that one is disliked by other people.

YOUTH: No! That's totally wrong. There is no way that could be called freedom. That's a diabolical way of thinking to coax one into evildoing.

PHILOSOPHER: You've probably been thinking of freedom as "release from organizations." That breaking away from your home or school, your company or your nation is freedom. However, if you were to break away from your organization, for instance, you would not be able to gain real freedom. Unless one is unconcerned by other people's judgments, has no fear of being disliked by other people, and pays the cost that one might never be recognized, one will never be able to follow through in one's own way of living. That is to say, one will not be able to be free.

YOUTH: Be disliked by other people—is that what you are saying?

PHILOSOPHER: What I am saying is, don't be afraid of being disliked.

YOUTH: But that's—

PHILOSOPHER: I am not telling you to go so far as to live in such a way that you will be disliked, and I am not saying engage in wrongdoing. Please do not misunderstand that.

YOUTH: No. Then let's change the question. Can people actually endure the weight of freedom? Are people that strong? To not care even if one is disliked by

one's own parents—can one become so self-righteously defiant?

PHILOSOPHER: One neither prepares to be self-righteous nor becomes defiant. One just separates tasks. There may be a person who does not think well of you, but that is not your task. And again, thinking things like *He should like me* or *I've done all this, so it's strange that he doesn't like me*, is the reward-oriented way of thinking of having intervened in another person's tasks. One moves forward without fearing the possibility of being disliked. One does not live as if one were rolling downhill, but instead climbs the slope that lies ahead. That is freedom for a human being. Suppose that I had two choices in front of me—a life in which all people like me, and a life in which there are people who dislike me—and I was told to choose one. I would choose the latter without a second thought. Before being concerned with what others think of me, I want to follow through with my own being. That is to say, I want to live in freedom.

YOUTH: Are you free, now?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. I am free.

YOUTH: You do not want to be disliked, but you don't mind if you are?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that's right. Not wanting to be disliked is probably my task, but whether or not so-and-so dislikes me is the other person's task. Even if there is a person who doesn't think well of me, I cannot intervene in that. To borrow from the proverb I mentioned earlier, naturally one would make the effort to lead someone to water, but whether he drinks or not is that person's task.

YOUTH: That's some conclusion.

PHILOSOPHER: The courage to be happy also includes the courage to be disliked. When you have gained that courage, your interpersonal relationships will all at once change into things of lightness.

You Hold the Cards to Interpersonal Relationships

YOUTH: Well, I never would have imagined I'd visit a philosopher's place to hear about being disliked.

PHILOSOPHER: I am well aware that this is not an easy thing to swallow. It will probably take some time to chew over and digest. If we go any further with this today, I think you won't be able to keep it in your head. So I would like to talk to you about one more thing, a personal matter that relates to the separation of tasks, and then finish up for today.

YOUTH: All right.

PHILOSOPHER: This one, too, is about relationships with parents. My relationship with my father had always been a rocky one, even when I was a child. My mother died when I was in my twenties, without us ever engaging in anything like real conversation together, and after that my relationship with my father became increasingly strained. That is, until I encountered Adlerian psychology and grasped Adler's ideas.

YOUTH: Why did you have a bad relationship with your father?

PHILOSOPHER: What I have in my memory is an image from a time when he hit me. I have no recollection of what I might have done to bring it on. I only remember hiding under a desk in an attempt to escape him, when he dragged me out and hit me hard. And not just once, but many times.

YOUTH: That fear became a trauma . . .

PHILOSOPHER: I think that until I encountered Adlerian psychology, I understood it in that kind of way. Because my father was a moody, taciturn person. But to think to myself, *He hit me that time, and that is why our relationship went bad*, is a Freudian etiological way of thinking. The Adlerian teleology position completely reverses the cause-and-effect interpretation. That is to say, I brought out the memory of being hit because I don't want my relationship with my father to get better.

YOUTH: So first you had the goal of not wanting your relationship with your father to get better and not wanting to repair things between you.

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. For me, it was more convenient to not repair my relationship with my father. I could use having a father like that as an excuse for why my own life wasn't going well. That for me was a virtue. And there was also the aspect of taking revenge on a feudal father.

YOUTH: That is exactly what I wanted to ask about! Even if the cause and effect were reversed, that is to say, in your case, you were able to analyze yourself and say, "It isn't because he hit me that I have a bad relationship with my father, but that I brought out the memory of being hit because I don't want my relationship with my father to get better," even then, how does it actually change things? It doesn't change the fact that you were hit in childhood, right?

PHILOSOPHER: One can think from the viewpoint that it is an interpersonal relationship card. As long as I use etiology to think, *It is because he hit me that I have a bad relationship with my father*, it would be a matter that was impossible for me to do anything about. But if I can think, *I brought out the memory of being hit because I don't want my relationship with my father to get better*, then I will be holding the card to repair relations. Because if I can just change the goal, that fixes everything.

YOUTH: Does that really fix things?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course.

YOUTH: I wonder if you really feel so from the bottom of your heart. I can understand it in theory, but the feeling just doesn't sit right with me.

PHILOSOPHER: Then it's the separation of tasks. It's true that my father and I had a complicated relationship. He was a stubborn person, and I could never imagine his feelings being able to change easily. Moreover, there was a strong possibility that he had even forgotten ever raising his hands against me. However, at the time of making my resolution to repair relations, it did not matter to me what sort of lifestyle my father had, or what he thought of me, or the kind of attitude he might adopt in response to my approach—such things didn't matter at all. Even if there were no intention to repair relations on his side, I would not mind in the least. The issue was whether or not I would resolve to do it, and I was always holding the interpersonal relationship cards.

YOUTH: You were always holding the interpersonal relationship cards?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. Many people think that the interpersonal relationship cards are held by the other person. That is why they wonder, *How does that person feel about me?* and end up living in such a way as to satisfy the wishes of other people. But if they can grasp the separation of tasks, they will notice that they are holding all the cards. This is a new way of thinking.

YOUTH: So due to your changing, did your father change too?

PHILOSOPHER: I did not change in order to change my father. That is an erroneous notion of trying to manipulate another person. Even if I change, it is only "I" who changes. I do not know what will happen to the other person as a result, and that is not an aspect I can take part in. This too is the separation of tasks. Of course, there are times when, in tandem with my change—not *due to* my change—the other person changes too. In many cases, that person will have no choice but to change. But that is not the goal, and it is certainly possible that the other person will not change. In any case, changing one's own speech and

conduct as a way of manipulating other people is clearly a mistaken way of thinking.

YOUTH: One must not manipulate other people, and manipulating cannot be done.

PHILOSOPHER: When we speak of interpersonal relationships, it always seems to be two-person relationships and one's relationship to a large group that come to mind, but first it is oneself. When one is tied to the desire for recognition, the interpersonal relationship cards will always stay in the hands of other people. Does one entrust the cards of life to another person, or hold onto them oneself? Please take your time and sort through these ideas again in your own home, about the separation of tasks and about freedom. I will be waiting for you here, next time.

YOUTH: All right. I will give it some thought on my own.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, then . . .

YOUTH: Please, there is just one more thing I want to ask you.

PHILOSOPHER: What is it?

YOUTH: In the end, were you able to repair your relationship with your father?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, of course. I think so. My father fell ill, and in the last few years of his life, it was necessary for me and my family to take care of him. Then one day, when I was taking care of him as usual, my father said, "Thank you." I had not known my father possessed such a word in his vocabulary, and I was astonished and felt grateful for all the days that had passed. Through the long years of my caregiving life, I had tried to do whatever I could, that is to say, I had done my best to lead my father to water. And in the end, he drank. I think he did.

YOUTH: Well, thank you very much. I will come again at the same time.

PHILOSOPHER: I had a good time. Thank you, too.