

A Modern Diogenes

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"Dos moi pou sto kai teu geu kineso." "Give me a point to stand on and I shall move the earth." No modern Archimedes has yet found the cardinal point for such a move. Earth is still turning her old circles. The conception of such a point of leverage, however, might be considered as a first holistic approach to planetary problems.

It seems that in the centuries between Archimedes' time and the present, Holism has fared rather poorly, especially with the sciences that are concerned with the individual. In other fields of research universal laws of movement were explored, while the individual was almost frozen into a static sociological, biological, or economic entity, his psychological make-up reacting somewhat like the anvil to the hammering forces of stimuli. No wonder that it seemed, then, advisable to train the individual in the belief that only "ruggedness" would enable the anvil to withstand all the inimical attacks of the outside world, and that individualism, preferably of the rugged type, alone would grant personal safety in no-man's land.

"Give me a point to stand on from which I could understand the problems of life," a standpoint from which the complexity of situations, inter-relations, forces, could become comprehensible without being obscured by the delirious individualistic factors of ignorance, greed, and fear.

The laws of movement of earth are inseparably connected with those governing the course of the other planets. The complexity of these laws does not complicate the movement of the single planet, nor is it complicated by it, as long as no explosion nor any other abnormal event disrupts the equilibrium of the whole system and creates a planetary catastrophe. By the same token one should be allowed to assume that the complexity of problems that face mankind as a whole does not complicate the life of the single individual, but that complications might arise by the explosion or catastrophes generated by individuals within themselves, and in their inter-relations in groups, nations, races, and the interaction with them.

It seems to me that Adler's approach to the psychological problems of the individual is of major importance because it reaches beyond the single socio-bio-psychological entity of the person into his con-

nectedness with the whole, of which he is a part, and that it gives the holistic viewpoint from which the complexity of life can be disentangled from the complications carried into it by the actions of people and peoples.

The ills of mankind, wars, crises, hunger, are contrary to life; they are the death warrants not only for the single individual but for mankind as an entity. Life's complexity is unfortunately perverted into a complicated, convulsive, and all engulfing turmoil so that the constructive forces of life, social consciousness, a feeling of community and solidarity, seem weak and ineffective compared to the destructive ones.

Humanity, groping for survival, confused in its goals and the method of attaining them, is like Mephistopheles, "a part of that force which ever wills the good, and ever creates evil."

I believe that only from the standpoint of Individual Psychology can understanding be gained for a world running amok. Adler's theory of the inferiority and superiority complexes, the expressions of the individual's struggle for prestige and recognition, for power in any guise, for central and egocentric positions, proves the mistaken conception which individuals as well as nations and races harbor: that life is to be lived on a vertical plane. Jacob's ladder of the Old Testament, with Jacob at the bottom and the angel at the top, is the poetic visualization of the world's most tragic belief. There is, apparently, only room for one on each rung, and he who wants to ascend has to drag his fellow man down so that he can take his place: "*Ote-toi que je m'y mette*" ("Get away, so that I can place myself there"). And with that idea, living together degenerates into the battle for the rung. The fight is on with active or passive means, with neurosis, psychosis, addiction, crime, suicide. All this is carried from the individual via family, group, nation, race, into the world, complicating the complexity of problems so that notions of peace, relative security, confidence in the future, and many others, have become relegated to fairyland, with no hope for the "And they lived happily ever after."

Adler was the one who in all his teachings pointed out the fallacy of living on a vertical plane. He showed time and again in his work with individuals, as well as in his whole system of psychological approach to medicine and education, that only living on a horizontal plane frees the individual from himself and offers him the opportunity to develop to his maximum of self-realization.

On the horizontal plane each and every one has his way free before him. He has his own start, his own road, his own goal. Roads may

cross, goals coincide, but by evolving a spirit of co-operation and of social consciousness the individual can advance and become individuated, a whole unencumbered personality together with the rest of his fellow men. Only in individuation can the individual reach the optimum of his capabilities; that is to say, in co-operation with others, as opposed to individualization on the vertical plane, which means the fight of one against the whole.

The shift from the self-centered position of the child to a "wholeness-centered" position makes sound individuals and a sound world possible. Otherwise problems remain unsolved, or difficulties are created, complications arise, and the whole suffers under the destructive impact of neurotic individuals, or groups, or nations.

It might be helpful to put into a simile what manifests itself so clearly as violation of the laws of living together. I see the whole human race as an orchestra. Each player is important, of equal importance, as symphony or cacophony depends upon the full co-operation of all among themselves, with the conductor as the co-ordinator, in order to do justice to the work to be performed. I think of Haydn's symphony with the drum beat, the measure that represents the climax of the composition. And there sits the drummer, remote from the first row, almost disappearing behind the other instruments, and not under the immediate attention of the audience. He sits and day-dreams, dreams of glory: "What a shame that I am relegated to such a place and such an instrument; nobody sees me, they don't even know that I exist. They look at that guy, the first violinist, concert master they call him; why, what master does he think he is? He is not anything to look at. If I were in his place, then, yes, they would have somebody to clap to. I certainly would cut a much better figure than he does; and let not him or anyone else fool himself, I would be without any doubt a much better violinist than he ever could be. If only I could make up my mind to study the violin. I always wanted to, but for some reason never did. Life has been against me, but if ever I do, the world for once will see what a concert master should be like." . . . Sits and dreams, glorious dreams of elevation of self and belittling of the "foe": "*Ote-toi que je m'y mette.*" His measure comes—and he forgets to beat his drum. The whole symphony falls flat. As flat as the world, because there are too many daydreaming drummers among individuals and groups, and nations, and races. And too few who have an interest in the symphony.

But, thanks to Adler, this, too, has been made understandable.