

WAR AND PEACE BETWEEN THE SEXES

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Not the least one among Adler's contributions to understanding human nature is the enlightenment he gave us in regard to the relation between the sexes as well as in regard to their sex-relation.

Sex has been so much in the limelight through books and lectures, so much has it been discussed, that this problem already should have been settled and done with. But it is not solved at all. On the contrary - as regards sex - it seems that people learn more and more and know less and less. At least this is the conclusion we come to when we see how people conduct themselves in love and marriage. Very often we see failure after failure, seldom we see a happily fulfilled and lasting sex-relationship.

Why is this so?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that no true understanding of the relationship between the sexes can be achieved as long as sex is regarded as a "thing in itself." It is not a thing in itself, not an independent realm, no enclave separated from the unit which each personality with its untold facets represents. Sexuality is no more and no less than one way of expressing ourselves. It is one of the most dynamic, most powerful of expressions, but it always is only one part of a totality, the personality. What takes the lead in each life is the totality and never the part. Therefore, when speaking about the relation between the sexes it does not mean just sex-relation.

Relationship between the sexes runs a gamut of wide range. Reflected in the mirror of marriage the relationship between man and woman encompasses every form of relationship that may exist between one human being and another. There we find the social structure, the mutual status of man and woman in the family as well as in public life. We find the relationship of labor, the joint acquisition and distribution of the means of existence. Included is the erotic and sexual relationship, this mutual giving and taking of pleasure, connected - at least theoretically - with the instinct of reproduction. It embraces those interests which we may sum up as spiritual, such as religion and philosophy of life. And last but unfortunately not least we find the relation between the sexes to be a most cherished battlefield for our instinct for mental self preservation, the search for self-assertion. We know that economic and social relationships are governed by the striving for self-assertion which often leads to the will for supremacy. This is also true of the attitude of the sexes toward each other.

In his theory of the three great tasks of life Adler traced the way of development the individual has to take: he saw marriage, as it is

established within the frame of our culture as the final proof of how far the individual had accomplished his or her personal growth and how far he had been able to master those life tasks.

But Adler did not stop at problems of the single individual. He used his knowledge not only for understanding personal problems, he applied this knowledge to cultural problems as well. The range of Adler's books shows the wide arc of his understanding of human nature. With his book about organ inferiority he started from apparently unimportant things, like small physical shortcomings, and taught us to understand their great importance; and he did not fall short of one of the deepest longings of mankind, the problem of immortality, the longing to enlarge our lives beyond earthly death. His book *Der Sinn des Lebens* (What Life Should Mean To You) displays this problem.

From the start on up to the end, all that Adler taught has its most important meaning when applied to the problem of war and peace between the sexes.

Let us start where he started with the urge to compensate for bodily shortcomings in any available way and especially inducing the attitude of the fox towards the grapes, namely, the tendency to degrade what is beyond our reach.

This knowledge will lead us to the understanding of man's urge to degrade the female sex, to put women on an inferior level. We all know only too well how far the theory of equal rights for women differs from its practice. It is needless to go into details here. Within our culture the female sex holds the second place, yet there is not one single proof that it is so in Nature.

As we know that physical shortcomings are inductive to compensating by degrading others, and as man is so busy degrading women, we may look for such shortcomings on the part of the male, and we will find them. Man, by nature, is suffering from two shortcomings in relation to the other sex, from which the woman is free. Both of these shortcomings are hard to bear and the more so since there is no escape from them.

One of man's shortcomings is his unstable and capricious sexual capacity, the problem of impotence. Only those dealing professionally with psychological problems ever will know how much men are haunted by this problem. It does not matter whether they are actually impotent or not. Even very potent men never feel absolutely sure on this point; some self-doubt still remains.

Man's sexual power in fact is inferior to that of woman. His sexual functioning is unreliable and depends on circumstances, whereas that of women is independent from circumstances. According to their physiological condition women are able to have intercourse at any time and repeatedly, whereas man's physiology imposes sexual limits upon him. (I am speaking, of course, of the physiological factor only, psychological obstacles are equally frequent among both sexes.)

It is not generally known how far this feeling of being sexually inferior extends. It grows particularly when false prestige is present, together with a lack of courage. This situation is felt as an insurmountable obstacle and this creates more shame. How uncertain man feels in

this field is best recognized by the praise men give their sexual accomplishments, how proud they are of this prowess and how much they ask for recognition of it from their female partners. To put a special value on an accomplishment always means that we are lacking self-confidence on this point. Where we have self-confidence, there we take success more easily.

This one uncertainty of man would be sufficient for inducing him to degrade a partner so much superior on this point. Yet there is another shortcoming on the male's side that seems to create an even more powerful urge for overcompensation. It is the problem of uncertain fatherhood, which is closely connected with the human being's striving for immortality, for enlarging his life beyond earthly death. In his book, *What Life Should Mean To You*, Adler has shown ways to guarantee our part in posterity.

Yet the surest guarantee, the one that never can fail nor can be questioned, is posterity through our children - if beyond doubt they truly and unquestionably are our own children, a part of the self that will survive when we are gone.

This "beyond doubt" is given only to women. To men it is denied; men never can be absolutely sure and in fact never are. Up to now no means have been found to ascertain individual fatherhood beyond doubt. Even the laboratory tests for paternity single out only the group but do not identify the individual father. Man has nothing to rely on this matter but the faithfulness of the woman or at least her assurance.

Therefore man took the greatest pains possible to assure his fatherhood, were it only by fictitious or substitutional means. One of the fictitious means is the well known *Couvade*, the male child-birth; it is still in vogue within primitive tribes. When the mother has given birth, the man takes to bed, simulates weak health, gets special food and much care, so that he may recover from the pain of birth.

A substitutional means is the adoption, which the ancient Romans introduced as a legal institution, for the first time in history. It enabled men to replace bodily fatherhood by a spiritual one. Thus at least it was in their power to declare who had to be their children; they had the choice and were no longer dependent on the word of their wives.

Yet to substitute bodily birthing by spiritual ones seemed to be not enough to still man's craving for his own children.

In the 4th century B.C., Aeschylus in his play, *The Furies*, goes further. There Orestes is on trial for the murder of his mother. The Furies want him to be condemned to Hades, there being no more heinous crime than that of matricide because the child is by blood his mother's kin. Yet Apollo, the god of spirit, the partisan of the male, defends Orestes. He goes so far as to rob the mother of her part of parenthood and he says: "Not the mother's womb is the true parent...THE MALE IS PARENT; she for him, a stranger to a stranger, hoards the germ of life." This sentence, denying women all parentage, sticks out as a flamboyant sign of man's struggle for ascertained fatherhood.

There were other means used for this purpose, more tangible ones.

The rigidity of laws against female adultery, the death penalty for such crime (see Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*), served the same purpose. The medieval crusaders invented another means. They used the "chastity girdle," one of the most cruel things men ever did to women. An iron girdle was locked around the lower part of the female body, leaving no possibility for any sexual intrusion. The husband-crusader went away for years, took the key with him and could be tranquil that no false progeny might issue.

The modern attitude of double morality, toward conjugal side-alleys according to the sex, is a modernised remainder of the more cruel attempts to ascertain fatherhood.

How far man's equilibrium might be shaken when he comes to face his doubtful fatherhood is to be seen in Strindberg's play, *The Father*. An extreme example, of course, but such an extreme case could never have been created had not the psychological element been alive in the spiritual make-up of man. And there it is, very much alive, whether the single man ever has given a conscious thought on it or not.

Thus we see man handicapped in two important fields, both connected with the fact of procreation. These two physiological burdens on the side of the male cannot be compared with those two others on the female side, menstruation and pregnancy. As long as women are bodily healthy and have not developed a neurotic masculine protest, neither menstruation nor pregnancy will produce in them such a deep feeling of being inferior as the man's handicaps produce in him. When women do develop a protest against their femininity, when they do feel inferior by the mere fact of their feminine physiology, they are induced to it not by nature but by their inferior position within our culture.

Thus we may say that it is difficult to be a woman as far as our culture is concerned, yet by nature it is much more harsh to be a man.

In many ways man compensated for his handicaps. He transferred his superiority to other fields. He excelled in many splendid achievements; science, art, state, law, church, etc., became the realms of his drive for appreciation. Not able to accept or to endure the sexual superiority of woman, and since there was no chance to win by increasing competition, man shifted the battleground for supremacy from the sexual towards the economic, social, and cultural fields. And he succeeded. Yet, to keep his superiority well established he had to exclude women from these fields, following the advice Tacitus already had given when he said, "We must hold women down, else they will outdo us." Therefore women had to have less possibility for developing their capacities, and when despite this they developed them, they were not permitted equal opportunities to make use of them. But first of all, the female sex had to be imbued with the conviction of its own inferiority. Here too man succeeded, and this closed the vicious circle. The belief that one is inferior inhibits the development of anyone's potentialities. This not only increases his inferiority feeling but actually makes the individual less capable. As Freidrich Schlegel said: "Oppression and mistreatment forced the female sex to degenerate and to deserve the mistreatment eventually."

I shall not go into any discussion about how much these conditions of struggle for supremacy have endangered the relationship between the single man and the single woman. Everyday experience shows only too well how much trouble it has brought into love, marriage, and the family. I wish to show the result it has brought to universal problems, problems of mankind. As long as the struggle between the sexes goes on, nothing can escape from being tainted by this battle for prestige, not the sweetest nor the saddest, neither love nor hatred, peace or war.

To understand this connection we shall apply Adlerian viewpoints to the problem of women's reaction toward fascism. The fascistic concept of woman's role placed it far backwards into a position from which it had just begun to be freed. It was Mussolini who said that he did not favor woman's emancipation because "women have no will power, no creative power...they are amusing, sentimental, credulous little animals." (His last mistress, after all, had at least the courage to leave her sure exile to share with him his last hour; maybe this changed his opinion.)

What the Nazis considered to be woman's role may best be quoted from Gottfried Feder, the exponent of Nazi ideology. He considered "democracy of sexes" as the greatest danger and wanted this "dragon" to be killed, in order to win back "the most precious treasure of this world, the woman who is maid and servant." The Nazis never concealed their deprecatory opinion of women, and how did the female sex react? In spite of all this, women ran after the Nazis and fervently helped them to come to power.

This too we learned to understand from Adler. He taught us that weak people want to establish their own position by belonging on the side of the powerful. Thus, women imbued by their feeling of being inferior within this male-ruled world wanted to find their humble place at least at the feet of those who were proclaimed to be the most powerful rulers. Deep within the heart of any feeble being sleeps the germ of a traitor; thus women became traitors to their own sex. Never could Nazism have grown as it did without the help of women.

The self-doubt of the female sex includes another great danger. He who does not trust himself does not trust others; therefore women often do not trust women. Exceptions have been seen, but they are relatively uncommon. Women are often not loyal to each other because each of them is so much obsessed with finding a little place of her own within this male-directed world. Therefore each woman is likely to be the rival of every other woman: There is no feminine front! And because there is no cooperation among women - at least much too seldom - women have so little to offer to the construction of a better world.

But men alone never will be able to create a better world. They never will be able definitely to end war and to establish a lasting peace as long as the battle between the sexes goes on.

The economist as well as the sociologist will explain exactly which factors bring about war, but the psychologist also has a word or two to say. We know that circumstances do form the individual, but as important as circumstances might be, the definite choice as to how to

make use of them lies in the hand of the individual according to his ultimate goal.

To make war is a male goal. As much as women may join in this job, by nature it is not a female goal. Ancient states ruled by women did not know the war of conquest, they were prepared for defense but they did not attack nor does this happen within primitive tribes which still live under matriarchal law. To attack is masculine, to conserve is feminine, as in the act of procreation. And exactly as a male and a female are needed to create a child, so are both sexes needed to create a better world. As long as women are excluded, as long as they are not permitted and therefore are not prepared and not able to contribute their full share, war never will be extinguished.

Pearl Buck, in her book *Of Men and Women*, explains warmaking as the formidable overcompensation of man's inferiority to woman. It is the only field where he need not fear women's competition and where he is sure to ascertain male supremacy, "replacing birthgiving by deathgiving." She proclaims man's degrading of women as the greatest danger for democracy and as a much more powerful factor for establishing fascism than any fifth column ever can be.

As long as there is no democracy between the sexes, true democracy will not exist. Democracy cannot function as long as it is borne as an adornment one puts on for official occasion and takes off when at home. There is only one way out: Disarmament of the struggle for sex-supremacy! True democracy begins between the sexes. Thankfully we may call Adler a pioneer in this field.