

Humanity at the Crossroads

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Almost every day in this technological age we read and hear of new marvels of science—airplanes that travel a thousand miles an hour, miracle drugs which are steadily eliminating disease and prolonging our lives, countless new products that are designed to make existence easier, richer, and less hazardous. In terms of material resources we are already capable of creating an utopia for the human race on this earth. And yet we live in fear and uncertainty. We are constantly reminded that with all these marvels we have discovered, our capacity for making weapons of self-destruction seems to be far outstripping our efforts to promote our own survival. With the advent of atomic power, we have at last reached the stage where we can destroy lives faster than we can create them.

Most of us are also distressingly aware that our efforts to diminish the use of these weapons by the improvement of our relationships with one another seem as far from success as they ever have been. We have mastered nearly everything in sight except our own natures.

So the question arises: are we to be eternally fettered to these dispositions of ours which seem incapable of using technology more for the welfare of mankind rather than its destruction?

Perhaps the prospects for humanity are not so dismal as we think. As has nearly always happened before when such a crisis has arisen, there may be a solution in sight. Through modern psychology and particularly through the teachings of Alfred Adler, it is possible we have found the beginnings of an answer to this age-old problem.

Individual Psychology, which is the name Adler gave to his movement, teaches an understanding of the activity of the undivided personality in its surroundings and uses as its method the interpretation of those deep-lying factors which in their entirety constitute the character and behavior of the individual. The theory and practice of Individ-

ual Psychology is based on two fundamental rules which, if understood and universally applied, have enormous importance for the future of mankind. These are:

1. Our personality maladjustments, whether they lead us merely to temporary conflicts or result in more serious disturbances such as neurosis or psychosis, *do not* spring from innate or biologically predetermined drives but from our own misinterpretation of the meaning of life. Any person who is able to gain insight into the nature of his faulty view and is willing to take advantage of this insight can correct his view of life to a degree that will assure him a happier and more useful existence.

2. The basis of these personality maladjustments lies in the relationship of the individual to the other human beings around him. The success or failure in living of any person is inextricably bound up in the existence and welfare of his fellows; any move he makes in the direction of solving his psychological problems, if it is to be successful, can only be in the direction of cooperation and interest in the welfare of others.

The application of these two simple but vitally important rules are, in general, what differentiates Individual Psychology from most other psychological schools of thought. The therapeutic techniques of Individual Psychology are designed to show us why we made the interpretation—or misinterpretation, as the case may be—of life that we did, why it is so difficult to change this interpretation by ourselves without skilled psychological help, and above all, how we can make the changes that will lead us toward greater harmony with others in the three basic relationships which dominate our lives—work, friendship, and love.

Through Individual Psychology we are offered for the first time a common-sense answer as to why humanity has always recognized the value of the Christian principles of cooperation, kindness, and love of our fellow man, but for all practical purposes has done nothing about it. Adler clearly saw these principles not just as platitudes without substance but as universal laws of human existence, from whose effects none of us are wholly or even partially exempt. Even the criminal, who attempts to revenge himself by warring against society, or the psychotic who removes himself almost totally from contact with others, displays his recognition of these laws by his very attempts to evade them or deny their existence. Simply but unmistakably in his writings Adler shows us the penalties we inflict upon ourselves and on others by our failure to apply these universal laws positively during our journey through life.

Adler also emphasized that Individual Psychology should not just be a therapeutic technique for curing deep-seated emotional ills but a means of helping the person move towards a greater understanding of his own aims and needs in life and of their relationship with the aims and needs of others. Toward this end, Adler developed a program of child guidance that was successfully used in the public school system of Vienna in the years just before Hitler occupied Austria. Teachers were trained in the practical application of the fundamental principles of Individual Psychology, with special clinics being set up in some schools for treatment of the more serious cases. The results of this program demonstrated clearly Adler's view that Individual Psychology was greatly effective with children in their formative years, applied more as a preventive than a therapeutic measure.

As most of us know, the conflicts between nations and peoples are in a sense only magnifications of the neuroses of individuals. The same poisons that infect our national and world relationships with each other—hate, prejudice, suspicion, ignorance, intolerance, to mention just a few—animate us in our own private little wars against one another. We could therefore conclude that if Individual Psychology is useful in reducing the inter-personal conflicts to a minimum, it might also serve to eliminate war and its attendant miseries. Ideally, if we could reach the world's leaders today, such a solution might be possible. Obviously, when we know this is out of the question, what can we do under the circumstances?

One answer is found in the functioning of organizations such as the Institute for Individual Psychology, the Alfred Adler Society, and other groups devoted to the advancement of the principles of Individual Psychology. We are only as far away from the solution to this problem as the people we reach who are willing to find out about Individual Psychology for themselves and who in turn, will reach others. We will not achieve success through miracles but through understanding, cooperation, and the use of the information we have in creating further understanding among wider groups.

In another time, it might not have been necessary to point out the imperative relationship between our personal problems and the world conflicts going on today. But what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki has furnished us a timetable on which to measure the possible future existence of the human race. The fear of these weapons has brought us closer towards a workable system of collective security, but in turn, it has magnified the uncertainty of our existence to a degree

where an explosion could occur even more readily than before. We may gain a few hours or even a few years as a result of our present efforts in behalf of collective security; unless they can be utilized in order to reduce the tensions we are undergoing, we may find that instead of having bought time we have thrown it away.

Individual Psychology may be one answer to the enormously critical problems humanity is faced with today. It is only one answer; how important it can be depends to a large measure on those of us who have the opportunity to learn what Individual Psychology can do. To each one of us, physician, psychologist, teacher, or non-professional, Individual Psychology offers a hope for a better and fuller life for himself, and an opportunity to help others achieve a similar realization and fulfilment.