

NEUROTIC SOVEREIGNTY¹

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Technical progress reduces distances physically and makes thoughts and ideas travel farther and faster. The earth, which certainly once could appear impressive in its vastness, now shrinks to its true size, a small particle in space. This change in proportions will, in perhaps not too far a future, necessitate cooperation not only within the limits of this planet, but with whatever life may be found in other parts of our solar system.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND SOVEREIGNTY

As long as even small distances could keep individuals or families in ignorance of the existence of others, man could feel sovereign in his limited *Lebensraum*, the space in which his own life and death took place.

When aggroupment of individuals to tribes took place, personal sovereignty was transferred to the entire group, and cooperation among the members became a necessity for survival. Relinquishing one's own personal sovereignty must have been as painful then as it is now. The hard struggle, however, to find protection against the forces of nature could easily have compelled the individual to conform to the necessary demands of the group.

When the tribe as a whole took on the fight for sovereignty and survival, the single individual, no longer forced to fight his own battles against nature or enemies from without, might have felt himself less necessary or valuable. At this time the first signs of neurotic behavior may well have developed in some individuals.

THE NEUROTIC AND SOVEREIGNTY

To see his value challenged, or the fear of being found out as being deficient in what is to him the most important feature in life, constitutes the enormous plight of the neurotic, and drives him into the isolationistic attitude which seems so characteristic in the artful development of a neurotic symptomatology. The longing of every neurotic person is for a frictionless paradise in which he could reign supreme. This is in direct opposition to his functioning as a participating member in a world in which cooperation decides not only the

¹Paper read at the Seventh Annual Conference of the American Society of Adlerian Psychology, Los Angeles, California, May 17, 1958.

fate and value of the whole but foremost the fate and value of the person himself.

The clash between his inner world and an external situation that threatens the way to a goal of fictitious superiority results in retreat, or, as Adler called it, "advance to the rear." In the inner struggle between the hope of retaining his self-image and the fear of putting it to the test dictated by the requests of living together, the neurotic chooses isolationism because it allows him to maintain his sovereignty. All his attempts at proving himself "different," more "sensitive," valued higher than others, keep him in his imagination king, but in reality, king on a desert island, or master in a mousehole, free from responsibility.

Or the neurotic may seek refuge and try to find strength by joining a crowd, a gang, or some multitude of other neurotics, using conformity with the mass to decrease his own responsibility. Whereas this may seem as though he were sacrificing his sovereignty, this is not actually so. This kind of joining is a matter of summation rather than integration and leaves his sovereignty intact. Failure in a crowd is not as painful and value-diminishing as otherwise.

For the neurotic even a fictitious victory is of value. His belittling tendency is of help in gaining superiority over a value which threatens to make him feel like a worthless insect. His smugness, and snobbishness are most practical cover-ups for his unformulated desire that he himself should not be discovered as worthless.

But none of these solutions give the neurotic relief from his feeling of inadequacy. None is cooperative, and without cooperation no creation of value is possible, and therefore no self-realization, no satisfaction, no happiness.

The more our shrinking world demands integration, wholeness, and cooperation, the greater the threat to the neurotic individual who refuses to give up his sovereignty. More individuals vacillating between egocentric totalitarian isolationism and the attempt to measure up to their self-created ideal, will give up the battle and run for imaginary safety behind the barrier of neurotic symptoms. This might be the reason that social deviations seem so much on the increase. The great desire for oblivion expressed in alcoholism and drug addiction, and the conforming to gang action are signs of defeat in a desperate struggle of individuals with warped value conceptions and a social interest that never was developed beyond the limits of self-centeredness.

NATION AND SOVEREIGNTY

Integration alone is value producing, and this is valid for nations as well as individuals. As Barbara Ward has recently expressed the parallel between individuals and nations: "Total sovereignty is to the state what egoism is to the individual—the last, holiest, most highly treasured source of all disaster" (1, p. 37).

In the past greater urgency to meet the dangers threatening man's existence welded tribes more closely together. At the same time this probably led to conflict with other tribes asserting their own sovereignty. When nations evolved as still larger groups, the concept of sovereignty must have led then, as now, to expansive moves beyond the limits of their own territory, and also to defensive mechanisms against possible attack.

Today the time of sovereignty of a nation is disappearing rapidly and nations suffer from the same inner struggle as individuals do. The same isolationistic seizures, as one might call this, beset nations terrified to relinquish some part of their sovereignty. The very same idea of summation instead of integration into the whole of the world keeps nations in the state of two armed camps. The change connected with moving into the unknown is as frightening to a nation as to an individual.

This fear could be alleviated only if the neurotic ideal of autonomy, or self-centeredness, would give way to a task-oriented attitude. This means emphasis on a different motivation for accomplishment, a different evaluation of oneself according to different goals. Self-improvement should be the motivation for striving, not competitiveness which in reality is to follow the law of the jungle. The only fruitful form of living lies in the interest of all, in the commonweal of the whole, for man is an interdependent, not an independent unit.

REFERENCE

1. WARD, BARBARA. Can the West regain the initiative? *Atlantic Mon.*, 1958, 201 (2), 33-37.