

THE
COURAGE
TO BE
DISLIKED





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*The Japanese Phenomenon That
Shows You How to Change Your Life
and Achieve Real Happiness*

ICHIRO KISHIMI
AND
FUMITAKE KOGA

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Authors' Note

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Alfred Adler are all giants in the world of psychology. This book is a distillation of Adler's philosophical and psychological ideas and teachings, taking the form of a narrative dialogue between a philosopher and a young man.

Adlerian psychology enjoys a broad base of support in Europe and the United States, and presents simple and straightforward answers to the philosophical question: How can one be happy? Adlerian psychology might hold the key. Reading this book could change your life. Now, let us accompany the young man and venture beyond the "door."



On the outskirts of the thousand-year-old city lived a philosopher who taught that the world was simple and that happiness was within the reach of every man, instantly. A young man who was dissatisfied with life went to visit this philosopher to get to the heart of the matter. This youth found the world a chaotic mass of contradictions and, in his anxious eyes, any notion of happiness was completely absurd.



Introduction

YOUTH: I want to ask you once again; you do believe that the world is, in all ways, a simple place?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, this world is astonishingly simple and life itself is, too.

YOUTH: So, is this your idealistic argument or is it a workable theory? What I mean is, are you saying that any issues you or I face in life are simple too?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, of course.

YOUTH: Alright then, but let me explain why I have come to visit you today. Firstly, I want to debate this with you until I am satisfied, and then, if possible, I want to get you to retract this theory.

PHILOSOPHER: Ha-ha.

YOUTH: Because I have heard all about your reputation. The word is that there is an eccentric philosopher living here whose teachings and arguments are hard to ignore, namely, that people can change, that the world is simple and that everyone can be happy. That is the sort of thing I have heard, but I find that view totally unacceptable, so I wanted to

confirm things for myself. If I find anything you say completely off, I will point it out and then correct you . . . But will you find that annoying?

PHILOSOPHER: No, I would welcome the opportunity. I have been hoping to hear from a young person just like you and to learn as much as possible from what you can tell me.

YOUTH: Thanks. I do not intend to dismiss you out of hand. I will take your views into consideration and then look at the possibilities that present themselves. “The world is simple and life is simple, too”—if there is anything in this thesis that might contain truth, it would be life from a child’s point of view. Children do not have any obvious duties, like paying taxes or going to work. They are protected by their parents and society, and can spend days free from care. They can imagine a future that goes on forever and do whatever they want. They don’t have to see grim reality—they are blindfolded. So, to them the world must have a simple form. However, as a child matures to adulthood the world reveals its true nature. Very shortly, the child will know how things really are and what he is really allowed to do. His opinion will alter and all he will see is impossibility. His romantic view will end and be replaced by cruel realism.

PHILOSOPHER: I see. That is an interesting view.

YOUTH: That’s not all. Once grown up, the child will get entangled in all kinds of complicated relationships with people and have all kinds of responsibilities thrust upon him. That is how life will be, both at work and at home, and in any role he assumes in public life. It goes without saying that he will become aware of the various issues in society that he couldn’t understand as a child, including discrimination, war, and inequality, and he will not be able to ignore them. Am I wrong?

PHILOSOPHER: It sounds fine to me. Please continue.

YOUTH: Well, if we were still living at a time when religion held sway, salvation might be an option because the teachings of the divine were everything to us. All we had to do was obey them and consequently have little to think about. But religion has lost its power and now there is no real belief in God. With nothing to rely on, everyone is filled with anxiety and doubt. Everyone is living for themselves. That is how society is today, so please tell me—given these realities and in the light of what I have said—can you still say the world is simple?

PHILOSOPHER: There is no change in what I say. The world is simple and life is simple, too.

YOUTH: How? Anyone can see that it's a chaotic mass of contradictions.

PHILOSOPHER: That is not because the world is complicated. It's because you are making the world complicated.

YOUTH: I am?

PHILOSOPHER: None of us live in an objective world, but instead in a subjective world that we ourselves have given meaning to. The world you see is different from the one I see, and it's impossible to share your world with anyone else.

YOUTH: How can that be? You and I are living in the same country, in the same time, and we are seeing the same things—aren't we?

PHILOSOPHER: You look rather young to me, but have you ever drunk well water that has just been drawn?

Introduction

YOUTH: Well water? Um, it was a long time ago, but there was a well at my grandmother's house in the countryside. I remember enjoying the fresh, cold water drawn from that well on a hot summer's day.

PHILOSOPHER: You may know this, but well water stays at pretty much the same temperature all year round, at about sixty degrees. That is an objective number—it stays the same to everyone who measures it. But when you drink the water in the summer it seems cool and when you drink the same water in the winter it seems warm. Even though it's the same water, at the same sixty degrees according to the thermometer, the way it seems depends on whether it's summer or winter.

YOUTH: So, it's an illusion caused by the change in the environment.

PHILOSOPHER: No, it's not an illusion. You see, to you, in that moment, the coolness or warmth of the well water is an undeniable fact. That's what it means to live in your subjective world. There is no escape from your own subjectivity. At present, the world seems complicated and mysterious to you, but if you change, the world will appear more simple. The issue is not about how the world is, but about how you are.

YOUTH: How I am?

PHILOSOPHER: Right . . . It's as if you see the world through dark glasses, so naturally everything seems dark. But if that is the case, instead of lamenting about the world's darkness, you could just remove the glasses. Perhaps the world will appear terribly bright to you then and you will involuntarily shut your eyes. Maybe you'll want the glasses back on, but can you even take them off in the first place? Can you look directly at the world? Do you have the courage?

Introduction

YOUTH: Courage?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, it's a matter of courage.

YOUTH: Well, alright. There are tons of objections I would like to raise, but I get the feeling it would be better to go into them later. I would like to confirm that you are saying 'people can change', right?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course people can change. They can also find happiness.

YOUTH: Everyone, without exception?

PHILOSOPHER: No exceptions whatsoever.

YOUTH: Ha-ha! Now you're talking big! This is getting interesting. I'm going to start arguing with you immediately.

PHILOSOPHER: I am not going to run away or hide anything. Let's take our time debating this. So, your position is 'people cannot change'?

YOUTH: That's right, they can't change. Actually, I am suffering myself because of not being able to change.

PHILOSOPHER: And at the same time, you wish you could.

YOUTH: Of course. If I could change, if I could start life all over again, I would gladly fall to my knees before you. But it could turn out that you'll be down on your knees before me.

PHILOSOPHER: You remind me of myself during my own student days, when I was a hot-blooded young man searching for the truth, traipsing about, calling on philosophers . . .



Introduction

YOUTH: Yes. I am searching for the truth. The truth about life.

PHILOSOPHER: I have never felt the need to take in disciples and have never done so. However, since becoming a student of Greek philosophy and then coming into contact with another philosophy, I have been waiting for a long time for a visit from a young person like you.

YOUTH: Another philosophy? What would that be?

PHILOSOPHER: My study is just over there. Go into it. It's going to be a long night. I will go and make some hot coffee.

THE FIRST NIGHT: *Deny Trauma*



The young man entered the study and sat slouched in a chair. Why was he so determined to reject the philosopher's theories? His reasons were abundantly clear. He lacked self-confidence and, ever since childhood, this had been compounded by deep-seated feelings of inferiority with regard to his personal and academic backgrounds, as well as his physical appearance. Perhaps, as a result, he tended to be excessively self-conscious when people looked at him. Mostly, he seemed incapable of truly appreciating other people's happiness and was constantly pitying himself. To him, the philosopher's claims were nothing more than the stuff of fantasy.



The Unknown Third Giant

YOUTH: A moment ago, you used the words “another philosophy,” but I’ve heard that your specialty is in Greek philosophy.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, Greek philosophy has been central to my life ever since I was a teenager. The great intellectual figures: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. I am translating a work by Plato at the moment, and I expect to spend the rest of my life studying classical Greek thought.

YOUTH: Well, then what is this “other philosophy”?

PHILOSOPHER: It is a completely new school of psychology that was established by the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is generally referred to as Adlerian psychology.

YOUTH: Huh. I never would have imagined that a specialist in Greek philosophy would be interested in psychology.

PHILOSOPHER: I’m not very familiar with paths taken by other schools of psychology. However, I think it is fair to say that Adlerian psychology is clearly in line with Greek philosophy, and that it is a proper field of study.

YOUTH: I have a passing knowledge of the psychology of Freud and Jung. A fascinating field.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, Freud and Jung are both renowned. Adler was one of the original core members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which was led by Freud. His ideas were counter to Freud's, and he split from the group and proposed an "individual psychology" based on his own original theories.

YOUTH: Individual psychology? Another odd term. So Adler was a disciple of Freud's?

PHILOSOPHER: No, he was not. That misconception is common; we must dispel it. For one thing, Adler and Freud were relatively close in age, and the relationship they formed as researchers was founded upon equal footing. In this respect, Adler was very different from Jung, who revered Freud as a father figure. Though psychology primarily tends to be associated with Freud and Jung, Adler is recognized throughout the rest of the world, along with Freud and Jung, as one of the three giants in this field.

YOUTH: I see. I should have studied it more.

PHILOSOPHER: I suppose it's only natural you haven't heard of Adler. As he himself said, "There might come a time when one will not remember my name; one might even have forgotten that our school ever existed." Then he went on to say that it didn't matter. The implication being that if his school were forgotten, it would be because his ideas had outgrown the bounds of a single area of scholarship, and become commonplace, and a feeling shared by everyone. For example, Dale Carnegie, who wrote the international bestsellers *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, referred to Adler as "a great psychologist who devoted his life to researching humans and their latent

abilities.” The influence of Adler’s thinking is clearly present throughout his writings. And in Stephen Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, much of the content closely resembles Adler’s ideas. In other words, rather than being a strict area of scholarship, Adlerian psychology is accepted as a realization, a culmination of truths and of human understanding. Yet Adler’s ideas are said to have been a hundred years ahead of their time, and even today we have not managed to fully comprehend them. That is how truly groundbreaking they were.

YOUTH: So your theories are developed not from Greek philosophy initially but from the viewpoint of Adlerian psychology?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that’s right.

YOUTH: Okay. There’s one more thing I’d like to ask about your basic stance. Are you a philosopher? Or are you a psychologist?

PHILOSOPHER: I am a philosopher, a person who lives philosophy. And, for me, Adlerian psychology is a form of thought that is in line with Greek philosophy, and that *is* philosophy.

YOUTH: All right, then. Let’s get started.

Why People Can Change

YOUTH: First, let's plan the points of discussion. You say people can change. Then you take it a step further, saying that everyone can find happiness.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, everyone, without exception.

YOUTH: Let's save the discussion about happiness for later and address change first. Everyone wishes they could change. I know I do, and I'm sure anyone you might stop and ask on the street would agree. But why does everyone feel they want to change? There's only one answer: because they cannot change. If it were easy for people to change, they wouldn't spend so much time wishing they could. No matter how much they wish it, people cannot change. And that's why there are always so many people getting taken in by new religions and dubious self-help seminars and any preaching on how everyone can change. Am I wrong?

PHILOSOPHER: Well, in response, I'd ask why you are so adamant that people can't change.

YOUTH: Here's why. I have a friend, a guy, who has shut himself in his room for several years. He wishes he could go out and even thinks he'd like to have a job, if possible. So he wants to change the way he is. I say this as his friend, but I assure you he is a very serious person who could

be of great use to society. Except that he's afraid to leave his room. If he takes even a single step outside, he suffers palpitations, and his arms and legs shake. It's a kind of neurosis or panic, I suppose. He wants to change, but he can't.

PHILOSOPHER: What do you think the reason is that he can't go out?

YOUTH: I'm not really sure. It could be because of his relationship with his parents, or because he was bullied at school or work. He might have experienced a kind of trauma from something like that. But then, it could be the opposite—maybe he was too pampered as a child and can't face reality. I just don't know, and I can't pry into his past or his family situation.

PHILOSOPHER: So you are saying there were incidents in your friend's past that became the cause of trauma, or something similar, and as a result he can't go out anymore?

YOUTH: Of course. Before an effect, there's a cause. There is nothing mysterious about that.

PHILOSOPHER: Then perhaps the cause of his not being able to go out anymore lies in the home environment during his childhood. He was abused by his parents and reached adulthood without ever feeling love. That's why he's afraid of interacting with people and why he can't go out. It's feasible, isn't it?

YOUTH: Yes, it's entirely feasible. I'd imagine that would be really challenging.

THE COURAGE TO BE DISLIKED

PHILOSOPHER: And then you say, “Before an effect, there’s a cause.” Or, in other words, who I am now (the effect) is determined by occurrences in the past (the causes). Do I understand correctly?

YOUTH: You do.

PHILOSOPHER: So if the here and now of everyone in the world is due to their past incidents, according to you, wouldn’t things turn out very strangely? Don’t you see? Everyone who has grown up abused by his or her parents would have to suffer the same effects as your friend and become a recluse, or the whole idea just doesn’t hold water. That is, if the past actually determines the present, and the causes control the effects.

YOUTH: What, exactly, are you getting at?

PHILOSOPHER: If we focus only on past causes and try to explain things solely through cause and effect, we end up with “determinism.” Because what this says is that our present and our future have already been decided by past occurrences, and are unalterable. Am I wrong?

YOUTH: So you’re saying that the past doesn’t matter?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, that is the standpoint of Adlerian psychology.

YOUTH: I see. The points of conflict seem a bit clearer. But look, if we go by your version, wouldn’t that ultimately mean that there’s no reason my friend can’t go out anymore? Because you’re saying that past incidents don’t matter. I’m sorry, but that’s completely out of the question. There has to be some reason behind his seclusion. There has to be, or there’d be no explanation!