

THREE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES

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An abstract system of human behavior which meets psychological needs of the common man will eventually be popularized. The formulation will be condensed into popular parlance-slogans easy to memorize and repeat. This happens in politics, in philosophy and religion. In Paris, the cry arose, "Liberte! Egalite! Fraternite!" Among early Christians it was "Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

It is to be noted that this popularization occurred within the system of Individual Psychology. Alfred Adler hit upon a simplified statement of his concept of the life imperative. In order for life to propagate itself (sex) it must operate with a large degree of unity (altruism) toward these ends. This quasi-instinctual drive was termed a **task** by Adler and it has helped to serve the purpose of pointing up certain contents of his psychological system in which the individual organism acts as a whole. Adler speaks of three tasks of life which add up to an organic whole, providing each is brought into harmony—an organism functioning as though each **task** was equally important although not necessarily simultaneously activated or emphasized. The important thing is that at no time is one task directed toward the destruction of another. The cultural rise of mankind along these three lines have evolved from patterns set by nature which can be observed today in bird behavior, bee colonies and the mammals in general. Adler was simply affirming a natural fact, putting stress on the unhappy tendency of modern man to slight the social interest task. More serious still is his deliberate destruction of this one-third of the triune formulation. Adler published his three tasks in the critical days between the two World Wars. He witnessed a reaction to the socialism which was transforming his country which had encouraged many to believe that a democratic social economic order might eventually evolve. In his last book, disillusioned but still emphatic in his outlook, he placed **communal life** first in his listing.

Today there is a marked effort among scholars within the Adlerian tradition to restate the three tasks of Individual Psychology. This takes various forms, such as placing as to order to importance, clarifying the content, and even suggesting that a fourth task be added. Just as Neo-Freudians are revising the libido incentive, Adlerians are clarifying the imperatives which mold individual conduct. Rudolf Dreikurs and Harold Mosak (1966) ably reviewed earlier positions, here and abroad, and then added their own. They go even further

toward revision when they propose that a fourth be added to the others.

Adlerians should welcome these efforts to explain and revise, as it is obvious that there should be more clarification and certainly some established order, along with stated reasons for that order.

As noted above, in his last book, Adler lists the tasks in this order: 1. Communal life 2. Work 3. Love.

In the article containing the study of Dreikurs and Mosak, they follow the order: 1. Work 2. Social relationships 3. Sex.

In the same issue of the *Individual Psychologist* in which the second article of Dreikurs and Mosak appears, Danica Deutsch follows a naturalistic chronology as follows: 1. Love 2. Work 3. Social Relationships.

The Ansbachers in their exhaustive publication on *Individual Psychology* of Alfred Adler (1966) drop the work **task**, substituting the work **tie**. The "three general social ties" are listed: 1. Occupation 2. Society 3. Love, which is the same order followed by Dreikurs and Mosak.

Note should be made upon examination of the above, not only of the listing order but also in the terminology which is used. Important as it is to point these things out, it is more to the point that the content should be questioned. It is proper to question the use of the word **task**. This has the connotation of something unpleasant, a requirement to be supervised by a taskmaster. A college student might prefer the word, "assignment," and a member of the Society of Friends would likely feel more at ease with his "concerns." When we say "task", we might logically think of a person's Work, but it is misapplied to Sex or Love which has all the elements of poetry, dedication and fulfillment.

Next, there is the question of what is embraced in these three imperatives? Adler was not seeking to include **all** significant life drives. In all probability he was selecting only three which seemed to be most fundamental—the foundation on which to build a complete life. He certainly realized that marriage did not in itself mean creative family life, or that being a member of a community, urban or rural, did not itself bring about creative citizenship. He spelled out in his last papers the reasons for one's retarded social interest as being "The pampered style of life." Neurotics regarded other people as something to exploit for one's own benefit. Thus, Adler laid the ground of the fourth task as added to the first three by Dreikurs and Mosak (1967), "To get along with oneself is thus the fourth life task." Adler could not have foreseen the rapid growth of Mental Health Centers which have sprung into life to deal with mounting inner conflict. With the threat of *Establishments* on every hand, the individual feeling of insecurity rises in proportion. Diagnostic procedures are the order of the day. As the authors of the fourth task conclude, "If we want to get along with ourselves, we must not drive, criticize, frighten, or fight ourselves." Essentially, they say, it is just as important that a person get along with himself as that he should get along with other persons.

This suggested addition to the original Adler statement leads me to describe in some detail a trinity of values which was originated in the late Thirties which bears a striking similarity. Unaware of the formulations within Individual Psychology, I was seeking some kind of functional description of Humanism, the non-theistic approach to religion. The Humanist Manifesto written in 1932-33 and signed by 34 teachers, ministers, and writers seemed too long and involved for popular consumption (Marley 1944). The need for condensation—a slogan led me to suggest in three lectures, the three following imperatives; Man must live, Man must live with others, Man must live with himself. These drives, I suggested, done creatively, comprised a human trinity (Marley 1944). The traditional Christian trinity which had been discarded by liberals was now restored in more acceptable form. The psychological urges of man to survive, to be gregarious and to enjoy it all, seemed to be adequately stated.

In 1949, after becoming a student in the Adlerian Institute in Chicago, I became familiar with Adler's writings and of course noted a certain similarity between his three tasks and the three imperatives noted above. His basic concepts of the dynamic of living with others, immensely enriched what I had considered the essentials to group existence. What I had originally termed as sociology, now became *social psychology*. His concept of Work seemed to fit in with my category of Survival, and his concept of Love, or Sex, had to do with the survival of the race.

With the schemology of the psychological imperatives charted, we may now turn to the content. Briefly stated, each of the three categories which I have presented, would be described as follows: First, the imperative to live, not to destroy oneself in a literal or figurative Death Wish. To sustain one's physical needs, to nurture new life and protect it from predators as in nature, is taken for granted. Stemming from the home, survival moves outward in concentric circles to good health, less competitive employment and self-participating recreation. To live, therefore, implies something beyond mere existence. It involves identification with the immensity of the universe, for to live in one's hometown is to live in a given part of the country and the earth. Living implies dwelling under a roof and beneath a canopy of galaxies, by day and by night. The first magnitude stars, like the Dog Star, make excellent companions, always there. If one wants to identify with a star or range around fancy-free like a comet, who is to deny him this pleasure. The suggestion that we add a fifth task, that of Cosmic Awareness, seems out of order if we are indeed committed to being alive.

Second, the imperative to have the proper relationship with the folk around us. To fail in this particular is to subject the self to various maladjustments which may lead to pathology. To achieve success is not necessarily to outclimb or outdistance the other. The competitive struggle

between people can become the friendly rivalry of running a race, not a conquest to possess the stadium.

Political leaders, said by Bernard Shaw to mostly engage in mischievous child's play, cannot escape the prevailing order of society which offers a choice between a military dictatorship and a cooperative commonwealth. If hives of insects and herds of quadrupeds have the ability and will to cooperate, is it too much to expect this of man who has coined such terms as brotherhood and gemeinschaftsgefuehl? If Emerson was right when he said, "Society everywhere is in a conspiracy against every one of its members," we had better create the therapeutic community, but fast.

Third, living with the self is largely a reflection of the life we are leading. Mental health, originally termed "mental hygiene" is in focus today largely because of the malfunctioning of the first two imperatives. Like the contamination of water and air, treatment must go back to the source. There will always be a crop of worry-worts, those whose anxieties have overridden their braking system, but the incidence can be reduced and certainly the treatment can be more effective than electro-convulsive shock therapy.

In conclusion, let it be affirmed that these three psychological imperatives fit together into what may be regarded as a unified whole. As the Ansbachers say of the three Adler **ties**, "They all throw crosslights upon one another." The three comprise a kind of tripod to support our survey attitude of each person in his respective environment. Two legs would be one too few, four legs would be one too many. Above all, we must be functional, so my wording for the three imperatives is *Manifesto to Man*, and my favorite preachment is by an unknown author, "Man is born to live, not to prepare for life."

References

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