

THE BIG IDEAS

Etiology vs. Teleology
Freud vs. Adler.

Separation of Tasks
Yours vs. others.

The Ticket to Freedom
And the courage to be disliked.

The Center of the World
<- Not you.

Lines vs. Dots
Life planning vs. living in the now.

Adler's Guiding Star
Happiness defined.

"Adlerian psychology is a psychology of courage. Your unhappiness cannot be blamed on your past or your environment. And it isn't that you lack competence. You just lack courage. One might say you are lacking in the courage to be happy."

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

The Courage to Be Disliked

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

BY ICHIRO KISHIMI AND FUMITAKE KOGA · ATRIA BOOKS © 2018 · 288 PAGES

"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.'"

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga from *The Courage to Be Disliked*

I got this book after one of the guys on our team told me how much he loved it. (Thanks, Mitch!)

As per the little introduction up there, it's written in the classical "dialogue" format method of Greek philosophy. The dialogue is between a "Youth" and a "Philosopher."

What are they talking about? Alfred Adler and his philosophy.

As per the sub-title, the book was originally a "Japanese phenomenon." It was written by Ichiro Kishimi (an authority on Adlerian psychology who translated a couple of Adler's books into Japanese) and Fumitake Koga (an award-winning professional writer).

Alfred Adler was a contemporary of Freud and Jung. Although not as widely known these days, he was one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century.

As I read the book, I was reminded of another somewhat obscure but equally influential twentieth century psychologist, Albert Ellis. Ellis helped create the cognitive behavioral movement. Check out our Notes on his [A Guide to Rational Living](#) and our Notes on [The Philosophy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) for more on all that (and to see the connection between all this wisdom and ancient Stoic philosophy).

Then, of course, we have our Notes on yet another twentieth-century luminary, Abraham Maslow. And, [dozens of Notes on the broader field of positive psychology](#).

If you're into exploring all the nooks and crannies of the psychological world for life-changing Ideas, I think you might enjoy the book as I much as I did. (Get a copy [here](#).)

As always, it's packed with Big Ideas. And, as always, I'm excited to share some of my favorites we can apply to our lives TODAY so let's jump straight in!

ETIOLOGY VS. TELEOLOGY

"PHILOSOPHER: Think of the possibilities. If one assumes that people are beings who can change, a set of values based on etiology becomes untenable, and one is compelled to take the position of teleology as a matter of course.

*"To quote Adler again:
'The important thing is not
what one is born with but
what one makes of that
equipment.' You want to be Y
or someone else because you
are utterly focused on what
you were born with. Instead,
focus on what you can make
of your equipment."*

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

YOUTH: So you are saying that one should always take the 'people can change' premise?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. And please understand, it is Freudian etiology that denies our free will and treats humans like machines.

... 'People are not driven by past causes but move toward goals that they themselves set'—that was the philosopher's claim. The teleology he espoused was an idea that overturned at the root the causality of respectable psychology..."

Welcome to one of the very first distinctions our Philosopher offers our Youth.

Freud and Adler were contemporaries. Adler was born in (Austria in) 1870 and died in 1937. Freud was born (in Austria) in 1856 and died in 1939.

The primary difference between their philosophies?

Basically: Freud was "etiological" while Adler was "teleological."

In short: Freud focused more on what he believed were the "etiological" "causes" of neuroses (which usually led to an archeological dig into your upbringing) whereas Adler focused more on what he believed were the misguided "teleological" roots of your neuroses (which leads to an exploration of what you want and whether or not your current choices are helping you get that).

For the record, if it isn't abundantly obvious: I lean heavily in the direction of Adler. :)

Yes, we all have a myriad of experiences that have influenced us. Not to mention genetic dispositions with switches that have been flipped in various directions based on our upbringing and lifestyle choices.

But...

And this is an important (and big!) but...

Those experiences don't CAUSE us to be a certain way today.

We get to create that.

As long as we don't give up our power.

Joseph Campbell comes to mind here. In *The Power of Myth*, he puts it nicely where he says: "Freud tells us to blame our parents for all the shortcomings of our life, Marx tells us to blame the upper class of our society. But the only one to blame is oneself."

So...

What do you want?

Are your behaviors helping you get that?

*"A healthy feeling of
inferiority is not something
that comes from comparing
oneself to others; it comes
from one's comparison with
one's ideal self."*

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

SEPARATION OF TASKS

PHILOSOPHER: We are all suffering in interpersonal relationships. It might be the relationship with one's parents or one's elder brother, and it might be the interpersonal relationships at one's workplace. Now, last time, you were saying that you wanted some specific steps. This is what I propose. First, one should ask, 'Whose task is this?' Then do the separation of tasks. Calmly delineate up to what point one's own tasks go, and from what point they become another person's tasks. And do not intervene in other people's tasks, or allow even a single person to intervene in one's own tasks. This is a specific and revolutionary viewpoint that is unique to Adlerian psychology and contains the potential to utterly change one's interpersonal relationship problems.

YOUTH: Aha. I am starting to see what you meant when you said that the topic of today's discussion was freedom.

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. We are trying to talk about freedom now."

Welcome to one of the central themes of Adlerian psychology, the idea of "separating tasks."

Basic idea: We need to know that, as the Stoics say, some things are within our control and some things are not. And, as Byron Katie says, we need to know whose business we're in.

And... Very importantly (!) we want to make sure we focus (exclusively!!) on that which is within our control (aka: our business!).

In fact, this whole idea of "separating tasks" could really be viewed as an interpersonal extension of Rule #1 of Stoicism.

Here's how Epictetus puts it in [The Enchiridion](#) (and [Discourses](#)): "Of things some are in our power, and others are not... examine it by the rules which you possess, and by this first and chiefly, whether it relates to the things which are in our power or to the things which are not in our power: and if it relates to anything which is not in our power, be ready to say, that it does not concern you."

And... Here's how Byron Katie puts it in [Loving What Is](#): "I can find only three kinds of business in the universe: mine, yours and God's. Much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our business."

So, if we want to suffer, the path is simple: Get in somebody else's business. Try to control the uncontrollable—their "tasks."

Solution: "Separate tasks."

Focus on what's within YOUR control and let others focus on what's within theirs.

P.S. Deepak Chopra echoes similar wisdom in [The Seven Spiritual Laws of Superheroes](#) where he tells us: "Certain personality characteristics become evident when we are in touch with our universal Self."

We are immune to criticism, but responsive to feedback. This means that on the emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels, we feel neither beneath nor superior to anyone else. This doesn't mean we are arrogant or cocky, but a quiet confidence and dignity radiate from us that result in a fearlessness and readiness to creatively take on any challenge. It also means we are never the victim of self-importance, knowing that all self-importance is a form of self-pity in disguise.

We relinquish the need for approval and control. This means that our actions are independent of the opinions of others and detached from expectations. We are motivated by our own powerful instincts and their evolutionary outcome, not because we have any expectations for payback.

We empower others by allowing them to be themselves. This means we react to people without preconditions and preconceptions. We accept people for who they are and do not force them to conform to our needs and expectations. In doing so, we empower others to express their full potential as well."

THE COURAGE TO BE DISLIKED

PHILOSOPHER: "[Being disliked by someone] is proof that you are exercising your freedom and living in freedom, and a sign that you are living in accordance with your own principles."

YOUTH: But, but ...

PHILOSOPHER: It is certainly distressful to be disliked. If possible, one would like to live without being disliked by anyone. One wants to satisfy one's desire for recognition. But conducting oneself in such a way as to not be disliked by anyone is an extremely unfree way of

"First, there are two objectives for behavior: to be self-reliant and to live in harmony with society. Then, the two objectives for the psychology that supports these behaviors are the consciousness that 'I have the ability' and the consciousness that 'people are my comrades.'"

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

"There is no need to be recognized by others. Actually, one must not seek recognition. This point cannot be overstated."

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

"That is why in Adlerian psychology, self-reliance as an individual and cooperation within society are put forth as overarching objectives. Then, how can one achieve these objectives? On this point, Adler speaks of surmounting the three tasks of work, friendship, and love, the tasks of the interpersonal relationships that a living person has no choice but to confront."

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

living, and is also impossible. There is a cost incurred when one wants to exercise one's freedom. And the cost of freedom in interpersonal relationships is that one is disliked by other people. ...

Unless one is unconcerned by other people's judgements, has no fear of being disliked by other people, and pays the cost that one might never be recognized, one will never be able to follow through on one's own way of living. That is to say, one will not be able to be free.

YOUTH: Be disliked by other people—is that what you are saying?

PHILOSOPHER: What I am saying is, don't be afraid of being disliked. ... I am not telling you to go so far as to live in such a way that you will be disliked, and I am not saying to engage in wrongdoing. ... One neither prepares to be self-righteous nor becomes defiant. One just separates tasks. There may be a person who does not think well of you, but that is not your task."

Remember that whole "separation of tasks" thing?

Well... That whole idea leads us to *this* idea (and, of course, the title of the book).

What people think of us is none of our business. We do our best to live in integrity with our highest values. What people *think* of us is out of our control.

We need to get really good at separating those tasks.

One could say that it takes (tremendous!) courage to be disliked.

Seneca would agree.

He tells us: *"Away with the world's opinion of you—it's always unsettled and divided."*

Kishimi and Koga put it this way as well: *"One moves forward without fearing the possibility of being disliked. One does not live as if one were rolling downhill, but instead climbs the slope that lies ahead. That is freedom for a human being. Suppose that I had two choices in front of me—a life in which all people like me, and a life in which there are people who dislike me—and I was told to choose one. I would choose the latter without a second thought."*

How about you?

YOU ARE NOT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

PHILOSOPHER: And the protagonist in one's life is the 'I.' There is nothing wrong with the train of thought up to this point. But the 'I' does not rule the center of the world. While the 'I' is life's protagonist, it is never more than a member of the community and a part of the whole. ...

All of us are searching for the sense of belonging, that 'it's okay to be here.' In Adlerian psychology, however, a sense of belonging is something that one can attain only by making an active commitment to the community of one's own accord, and not simply by being here. ...

One needs to think not, *What will this person give me?* but rather, *What can I give this person?* That is commitment to the community."

That's from a micro-chapter called "You Are Not the Center of the World."

Reminds me of some wisdom from David Reynolds' [Constructive Living](#). He happens to be a Zen-therapist who spent a lot of time in Japan so his wisdom seems particularly relevant here.

He says: *"The most peaceful people I know have given themselves away... On the other hand, the most miserable people I have known have been self-focused. They worry about getting their share; they evaluate everyone's acts in terms of how they themselves are affected." ...*

"The Japanese language uses a single word for self-centered and selfish. The word is 'jiko-chushin.' It means, literally, the self in the middle of the heart—the ego in the center of the mind. It means putting Old Number One first."

"As a result of having received counseling, what kind of resolution does the client make? To change his lifestyle or not. This is the client's task, and the counselor cannot intervene."

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

Adlerian philosophy *starts* with having a strong “I.”

A sense of self that is autonomous and independent of the good or bad opinion of others.

And... It doesn't *end* there.

That's just the starting point for us to face our “life tasks” in work and love and friendship.

We need to know that we're not the center of the universe as we commit to making a contribution to the world. This commitment to contributing to our community becomes our guiding star in life and the subject of our final Big Idea.

But first, let's connect some dots...

LINES VS. DOTS

“PHILOSOPHER: Do not treat it as a line. Think of life as a series of dots. If you look through a magnifying glass at a solid line drawn with chalk, you will discover that what you thought was a line is actually a series of small dots. Seemingly linear existence is actually a series of dots; in other words, life is a series of moments.

YOUTH: A series of moments?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. It is a series of moments called ‘now.’ We can live only in the here and now. Our lives exist only in moments. Adults who do not know this attempt to impose ‘linear’ lives onto young people. Their thinking is that staying on the conventional tracks—good university, big company, stable household—is a happy life. But life is not made up of lines or anything like that.

YOUTH: So there's no need for life planning or career planning?

PHILOSOPHER: If life were a line, then life planning would be possible. But our lives are only a series of dots. A well-planned life is not something to be treated as necessary or unnecessary, as it is impossible.”

That's from a micro-chapter called “Life Is a Series of Moments.”

Adler said that life isn't linear. There's no line that we can draw that starts “here” and ends “there.” Instead, it's more like a series of dots. Those dots represent the moments of our lives.

Fact is (as Kishimi and Koga) stress throughout the final part of the book, NOW is all we have. A series of “dots” that are meant to be lived earnestly. When we do THAT, we can let go of all of our incessant life *planning* and get on with the business of *actually* living.

Note: Their discussion here reminded me of our chat about Tal Ben-Shahar's Happiness Archetypes in which the happiest among us diligently pursue the best version of ourselves WHILE (!) enjoying the process.

ADLER'S GUIDING STAR

“PHILOSOPHER: When one attempts to choose freedom, it is only natural that one may lose one's way. At this juncture, Adlerian psychology holds up a ‘guiding star’ as a grand compass to a life of freedom. ...

YOUTH: A guiding star?

PHILOSOPHER: Just like the traveler who relies on the North Star, in our lives we need a guiding star. That is the Adlerian psychology way of thinking. It is an expansive ideal that says, as long as we do not lose sight of this compass and keep on moving in this direction, there is happiness.

YOUTH: Where is that star?

“When one is not following through with one's tasks, it is not because one is without ability. Adlerian psychology tells us that the issue here is not one of ability but simply that ‘one has lost the courage to face one's tasks.’ And if that is the case, the thing to do before anything else is to recover that lost courage.”

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

“As Adler says, ‘Children who have not been taught to confront challenges will try to avoid all challenges.’”

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

"Do you see it now? In a word, happiness is the feeling of contribution. That is the definition of happiness."

~ Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

PHILOSOPHER: It is in contribution to others."

Want happiness?

Adler is very clear on this point. Contribute to others.

May that be our guiding star as we have the courage to Optimize and actualize and give our gifts to the world.

Reminds me of that [Marcus Aurelius](#) gem we come back to often: *"Let your one delight and refreshment be to pass from one service to the community to another, with God ever in mind."*

Aurelius also says this: *"Never confuse yourself by visions of an entire lifetime at once... remember that it is not the weight of the future or the past that is pressing upon you, but ever that of the present alone."*

Which just so happens to echo the words from the Philosopher that immediately follow those above: *"... let's dance in earnest the moments of the here and now, and live in earnest. Do not look at the past, and do not look at the future. One lives each complete moment like a dance. There is no need to compete with anyone, and one has no use for designations. As long as you are dancing, you will get somewhere."*

And, finally, to make another parallel connection, Aurelius has this to say about having the courage to be disliked: *"The approval of such men, who do not even stand well in their own eyes, has no value for him."*

Here's to having the courage to be disliked as we strive to live our most authentic lives in service to our communities and to our world.

B

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.