

OBLIQUE HOSTILITY *

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We live in fear and hate. The history of the human race is the story of endless fighting. Hostility is one of the most basic of all human emotions. According to the Bible, God made man and the world and pronounced them “good” -- but, on the next page, fighting had broken out by man disobeying God’s command. In retaliation, man was thrown out of Eden. On the next page, Cain killed Abel. However the fighting may have started, it has not stopped in all this time!

The most remarkable part of all this fighting is that no one of us has ever been found who sincerely feels that he is the aggressor! Regardless of the aggression we have just committed, we have always an alibi that proves (to us, at least) that we are blameless. In spite of everything, we are always able to maintain a clean escutcheon. We are like the child who was caught stealing jam. He maintained that it was his hand, not he, that stole it.

To others, it may be obvious that we are responsible for starting the fight, but we are always aware that there was some extenuating circumstance that “drove” us to our course of action. Whether the Serpent that started all the fighting in Eden also had his alibi is not known. But with us, it is always the other fellow’s fault that we are fighting. All of us choose to believe that we were driven into fighting.

To what do we owe this remarkable ability to be right all the time? How does it happen that it is always the other fellow who starts all our fights? How does it happen that each of us is “a Man of Good Will” in his own right, but the other fellow is always “The Devil”?

Dr. Alfred Adler has given us as good an hypothesis or way of looking at the problem as any that exists. Adler claimed that each constructs for himself an Ideal Image -- a Superior Ideal. For each, this embodies all that he considers valuable, if and when we fall short of this ideal picture, we attribute the “imperfection” to forces outside ourselves. We believe that we and our Ideal Image are identities!

The difference, however, between ourselves as others experience us in action and our ideal picture of ourselves is as great as that which exists between the enlarged photograph we have on the piano and a candid snapshot of ourselves. In one, the lines and crow’s feet have been removed. When people see it, they ask us who that handsome person is! We like to (p. 51) believe we look like it, but our friends recognize us better from the candid snapshot which we try to hide from them. It was Burns, the poet, who wished,

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!

Generally, we hardly share this desire!

It is, then, the Superior Ideal which blinds us to our true dimensions -- the desire to seem Godlike in all respects. (The Serpent promised Eve that men would become "as gods" if they ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.) This "Godlike" image of ourselves, alone, prevents us from seeing also the hostility which is a part of each of us. We are, therefore, oblivious of the obvious -- the hostility we feel and express toward others.

The open hostility (which we call righteous or justified hostility) need not be considered at this time. Far more dangerous to ourselves and to others is that unrecognized, hidden, oblique kind of hostility that we express without being consciously aware that we are attacking others. Its manifestations are almost countless -- but about the only warning we have of its existence is that we may feel tense when confronted in some situations. More often we have no awareness at all, unless it is called to our attention. Then we disclaim it!

This hidden, oblique hostility is implicit in all neurosis and other character-disorders. It is so much a part of them that we overlook it by considering it "about normal." It is dismissed as being "human nature" to behave in such ways. Just because it is so obvious and widespread, we are oblivious to its significance.

There is abundant testimony to its presence. It is at the root of mass-hysteria, racial bigotry, lynching's, and similar outbursts of destructive hatred. If each of us were as good as he pictures himself in his Ideal Image, such outbursts could not happen! When fire breaks out in a theatre, more people are trampled underfoot than are burned. If we were as good as we would like to believe, this kind of "panic" would not destroy thousands of lives in emergencies.

Hostility can be likened to an iceberg that floats with nine parts submerged and only one part above the surface of the water. But let the mariner beware of the part that is submerged! And surely, we cannot, as individuals, afford to be unaware of our own hidden hostilities lest we be destroyed by their presence.

TYPES OF HIDDEN ANGER AND OBLIQUE HOSTILITY

Let us review only a few of the kinds of behavior that are commonly found in character-disorders as well as in what is generally known as "nor- (p. 52) mal behavior." We find: blues and depression, forgetfulness, tardiness, nervousness, irritability, passivity and laziness, boredom, hypersensitive feelings, accident-proneness, guilt-feelings, sleeplessness, rigid ethical standards, over-politeness, fatigue, jealousy and envy, nagging, belittling of others, neglect, anxiety-states, paranoid ideas, and countless others. And to these, we must add such activity as discarding chewing gum or burning cigarettes on rugs in theatre lobbies, leaving glass bottles on public beaches, defacing walls, destroying shrubs in parks, and similar hostile acts.

Such behavior always masks a fighting attitude -- an attitude of hostility and non-participation; there is always a revenge-motif at the root of each of them. They are oblique, hidden ways of showing the hostility we feel towards others.

In our civilization, there is a strong tabu against showing hostility openly. We learn as children that we must not show hostility toward parents, elders, and those in authority. We are

exhorted not to show anger against siblings or the neighbors' children. In fact, there are almost no situations in which it is appropriate for us to show our hostility when it exists. We must always maintain the semblance of good will and appear to be "on the side of the Angels" at all times. We learn early that we can get more by hiding hostility than by showing it openly. As a result, we learn to hide such feelings from others, and mostly, from ourselves. This probably accounts for the fact that mankind has always liked to believe that there is a "good self" and a "bad self" in each of us and that there is a Devil that forces us to do hostile things against our true will. This dichotomy is not so mysterious as it seems. It is only the Ideal Image (Superiority Goal) disclaiming the part of us that is not flattering to this image.

No one should conclude that fighting, per se, is a bad thing. Adler pointed out that all life is a struggle for survival. As long as man lives, he must fight to overcome the limitations of his puny body in a world he never made. The matter of prime importance, however, is the goals for which he fights! About fighting, Adler was very, specific. There is that fighting which is "on the useful side of life" and that which is "on the useless side of life." The first kind has accounted for all the progress of the human race. The second kind causes most of the human misery we still endure!

As an example of the first kind, we may cite Pasteur who had to fight inertia, ignorance, superstition, and entrenched privilege as well as bacteria before he was able to establish his invaluable discoveries. The fight against disease, war, famine, flood, and outworn custom is far from ended.

Fighting on the useless side of life is that kind of effort we make to achieve special privilege at the expense of others. This is the basis of all exploitation and master-slave relationships. It impoverishes rather than enriches the situations that it touches. As examples, we may look at anything (p. 53) from the tyranny of a spoiled child demanding its own way through the gamut of oppression and criminality that still surrounds us in this world.

Individuals who fight on the useful side have one thing in common: a high degree of activity and feeling of "live and let live" toward others. This is what Adler calls "social feeling." Such an individual allows others to have equal value in his own eyes.

On the useless side, two types are found. One has a high degree of activity and a high degree of hostility toward others. These are the delinquents: what they want, they take regardless of whom they damage. They are not concerned with giving anything of value in return for what they get from society. The second type has a low degree of activity and a high degree of hostility. Lacking the energy to attack openly, they sabotage and express their hostility obliquely. This, said Adler, is the path to neurosis.

Few wish to follow the path of open hostility because it subjects us to direct retaliation; we shun such an attack. On the contrary, we go to great lengths to maintain the semblance of good will toward the demands of the community. But behind this pretense of friendliness we shout a silent "NO." Adler called this the "Yes-But" approach to life in which our words are pious but our activity lies in another direction. This is the path of deception!

Deception of others is always dangerous -- but self-deception does the greatest damage. Our hidden hostilities, which we refuse to recognize, lie uncharted like land-mines waiting to explode when we trip over them. We cannot correct the suffering we experience in a neurosis because we lack awareness of our submerged hostility. We live lies and are even expected to do so. The tennis champion, for example, loses to the contender. He goes to the net and smilingly congratulates the newborn champ. This is a show of "good sportsmanship" -- but hidden lies the humiliation, disappointment, anger, and fear of the future in the heart of the loser.

But why do some find themselves more on the useful side and others more on the useless side of life? Adler has made it abundantly clear that this was determined for each of us during our earliest childhood. The basic pattern of our likes and our dislikes (hostilities) was set according to the view we took of ourselves in relation to the outside world around us. If we did not feel either "much put back" or "much put ahead" in our earliest situation, we developed no serious tensions that led to the formation of submerged hostility. But insofar as we did not "feel equal" to the confronting world around us, we etched a pattern of hostility against those elements that seemed to threaten us! Individual Psychology has made an extensive examination of those situations of early childhood which usually lead a child to feel "unequal" (superior-inferior) to the world around him. (p. 54)

Those early situations in which one felt "unequal" persist in the psyche throughout life and lead us into false adjustments -- unless they are understood and our mistakenly hostile views corrected. For example, if a child has felt "put back" in relation to a sibling with regard to his mother's preference for him, he may find it difficult to establish faith in women in his adult years. He may avoid marriage, or if married, may be extremely jealous. No amount of devotion on the part of the wife reassures him.

For a better understanding, we must adopt some viewpoint about the psyche itself and its function in the individual. Adler described the psyche "as if" it were another organ of the body itself. He considered it "an organ of adaptation," supplied by evolution for the purpose of bringing the total organism into effective contact with the outside world for the purpose of survival! In short, it is an organ of connection made in such a way that it can modify both inner and outer circumstances as the need for survival demands.

Self-preservation is the first law of nature and to this aim or goal the whole psyche is dedicated. The human animal, however, is not able biologically to survive without help from others of its kind. So for human beings, there is a second law of nature fully as important as the first: for our own survival, we must join our efforts with those around us! In short, to save ourselves, we must make life secure for others.

There are a number of situations in early life that may lead a child into non-participation, negation, and sabotage so that he does not train himself to join in productive effort with others. One is pampering. A child who is pampered easily believes that "his wishes should become laws binding on the community"; he does not expect to make any effort for himself but expects to exploit the strength of others. He wants only to rule and control. It is not surprising then, that such a child will be deeply hostile to others whom he regards mainly as his servants.

A second source of early misunderstanding that leads to hostility stems from neglect. The child that is not really wanted soon becomes aware that he is rejected. The chances are very strong that he will react with equivalent hostility and negativism. As a result, he may not find the path to participation as an equal member of the community.

A third source of hostility may arise from a protracted early illness. Such children may get the idea that they are "especially valued" because of the long care they received. They may seek, in later life, to avoid the need to be helpful while they hide behind the hostile demand for exemption.

Though these situations are vastly different, they all lead to the same result: the desire to achieve the status in society of a "favored child." The very first day of school may betray the hidden hostility implicit in such an ambition. When the child arrives and finds no seat reserved for a "favorite (p. 55) child," he may react unpleasantly and may insist on returning home. If prevented from leaving, he may choose to escape through phantasy (in which the pampering favorite child situation is created to suit his need).

Adler placed much emphasis on, the early education of a child and demonstrated that successful interpersonal relationships depend on "fair play." We must expect to share the disadvantages of community and not expect only the advantages; we must be as eager to give as we are to get. Only if relationships are kept on a 50-50 basis can we avoid the evils that follow exploitation. In short, the pampering parent who gives more than he should is as much mistaken as the pampered child who insists on getting more than he is willing to give.

Any departure from equality of privilege and responsibility creates a master-slave relationship with all the hostility that such mutual exploitation implies. The welfare of individuals and the growth of their capacities is properly accomplished only if we relate ourselves to each other on a basis of equal human value.

A most potent factor for creating hostility in children is the misuse of authority by adults. When there is a dominating individual in a family, he tends to place his commands above the desire and judgment of others dependent on him. Those who are in the weaker position are obliged to follow his will -- or, at least, they must appear to do so. Such systematic and habitual thwarting as is then experienced usually leaves the deepest hostility to any and all authority or authority-symbols. The person who has "braced his feet" in childhood against compulsion is seldom able later in life to forget the rage and humiliation suffered; he is ever on the alert for chances to rule -- lest he be ruled.

There are two kinds of arbitrary authority. Everyone recognizes open domination. But only a few recognize the dangers of "soft" authority. The one who wields it is often unaware that he is exerting arbitrary authority over his victim. The damage comes to light only when the injured one shows a dangerous inability to decide and act for himself in life. This is the kind of authority exercised by a parent whom a child loves so much that he would not even think of acting contrary to the implied wishes of the parent.

Harsh authority breeds resistance but “soft” authority saps initiative and judgment, for there is little chance for the child to develop such abilities. Nor does he generally realize the lack of them until it is too late to develop them easily.

Arbitrary authority of either kind develops either positive or negative dependence. Negative dependence is often mistaken for independence (having one’s own mind). A person can be said to be independent only if he is able to size up a situation and decide on a course of constructive action for himself for its solution. Negative dependence (contrariness) does not (p. 56) bother to look at the needs of the situation at all. Such individuals size up the persons in authority and then plan strategies to defeat their expectations! Their plans are not for construction -- they are aimed at destruction or evasion of authority.

A very clear example of this can be seen in the average “eating problem.” A child who makes a problem of eating is in negative dependence on the parents. He is not so much concerned with the question: “Am I hungry or not?” He is much more interested in defying parental power. Having learned from experience that his parents will try to force him to eat, he has only to sabotage such efforts on their part. The same is true for nail-biting, bed-wetting, and other tricks of passive resistance. Only a deeply entrenched hostility can account for positive and negative leaning on others.

The great tragedy lies in the fact that children thus damaged divert their psychic energies from the development of their own innate powers and use them only for opposition. They are incapable of good team work because they are always sure someone is trying to “boss” them. They truly lack “a mind of their own” because their thoughts are spent on watching the motives of others! Without true independence, they limp and elbow their way through life.

Arbitrary authority produces two kinds of children: those who fight openly, and the pseudo-good child. The latter is an “obedient” child (when he is watched and often when he is not supervised). But he is like a zombie in that he is lost if he is not acting under direction. He dares not try to organize his own time or effort lest he make a mistake. And because he is without a mind of his own and also charged with hidden resentment, he is easily led astray by active delinquent types. He is easily “enticed” into thefts and other scrapes with the law.

Arbitrary authority (over-control) almost always, then, results in producing dependency in children -- either the dependency of the delinquent or that of the child who leans on others. The hostility implicit in either negative or positive dependence is self-evident, since any kind of leaning is a burden on the productivity and freedom of those leaned upon.

One of the most prevalent sources of hostility in our civilization arises from a spirit of competition. Competition as a way of life probably arose from the fact that the human race developed through a long period of chronic scarcities. There were never enough of the basic necessities of life to provide for all. People competed and those who were not strong or clever died off. In other civilizations where food has always been abundant and the climate mild, more cooperative cultures exist in which men are not so strongly pitted against each other for survival as has been the case with us. But as a civilization, we have been sharply competitive. We have still to recognize that with modern technological advances we no longer (p. 57) need the intense

spirit of competition which breeds our hostility toward each other.

Consequently, from our earliest days, each of us is impressed with the need to be “first” and ahead of all others. Few can really be first in anything and no one can be first in everything. But since the spirit of competition is so strong, we strive to create the “illusion of being first.” This is called PRESTIGE. We work and struggle for prestige because we can use it to frighten others and keep them on a low level! It is this competitive spirit that causes us to be not entirely displeased at the misfortune of our friends! It also explains why we enjoy the petty satisfaction of surpassing others, why “loving families” are often riddled with hostilities and why marital partners often practice endless psychic cruelties on one another. We carry psychological bombs and guns to cripple others so they can’t compete. Or we “back-bite” and carry on character assassination for competitive gains.

It is not possible to give up entirely fighting against others -- for they also are trained to attack us. But most of the fighting we do is now wholly unnecessary in terms of survival; it is mostly aimed at increasing feelings of prestige -- and these are never satisfied. The vague desire “to be better than” makes us increasingly hostile and we spread this hostility diffusely over all confronting situations. If someone slights us, we become angry and depressed. But we become just as angry if a door sticks or a shoe-string knots.

Competition leads us to note and emphasize the difference between ourselves and others -- whether we are “better” or “worse.” These are called invidious comparisons because they leave with us an emotion! The emotion that is left, Adler calls “the feeling of social distance.” The person feels either “put back” or “ahead of”; in either case he feels removed! This has a most serious effect on his ability to release his efforts in participation with others. We cannot participate with those from whom we “feel removed.” We can do our best only if we “feel equal” with others or “feel equal” to the situation. Insofar as we “feel remote” we block ourselves from giving what is needed by the confronting situation. In short, we fail!

The Superiority-Inferiority Complex described by Adler is a psychological term for our old COMPETITIVE ATTITUDE. If we were not afflicted by the competitive spirit, we could not experience feelings of superiority-inferiority. We must compare ourselves against another before we can feel removed (superior-inferior). If we have this competitive outlook on life, we tend to see people according to the scheme shown in Figure I.

We are at position “0”: As we look at others, we arbitrarily decide that some of them should be placed in a “superior” position to us. The others appear to be worthy only of an “inferior” position. Without realizing what we are doing, we may discover that we have placed no one on a position (p. 58) of equality with us! This explains why loneliness is one of the most pronounced feelings present in all emotional disturbances! It is almost never absent.

There has been much argument to show that men are never born equal. Such arguments are often made by those who feel superior or inferior in order that they may justify current exploitations by which they hope to benefit in prestige. Others hold to such arguments to justify their unwillingness to contribute; they would like to prove they have “nothing to

“SUPERIOR

O EQUAL

“INFERIOR

Figure I

give” and should be excused from trying. Competitive individuals do not want to “feel equal.”

In reality, all men are equals in that we all share the same basic needs; we need sustenance, love, and human companionship! No one human being is free of these needs. The character of each is different from that of others only through the fact that each feels that he can achieve these basic needs in his own way better than if he tried to do it as others do. In short, superficial differences appear between character traits of different people because these traits are only means to an end (ways to contact and modify the outside world for survival). And though our methods (characters) may differ, our goal is the same -- survival. Differences of wealth, learning, status, et cetera, may exist but, in spite of them, the feeling of being equal can exist between any who are willing to give up the competitive attitude in interpersonal relationships! In short, we must give up the desire to be the favorite child.

Most neurotic behavior is the reflection of a strong competitive attitude behind which is the desire to rule and control others; the striving to be in the dominant position. The use of anxiety is an excellent example of this hidden tyranny. A wife expects her husband home at six o'clock but he does not arrive until six-thirty. He finds her pacing the floor in panic. During the half-hour, she has pictured him hit by an automobile, in a hospital or morgue, and dozens of other tragic possibilities. To quiet her, (p. 59) he promises never to be late again or to phone if he must be late. On the surface it would seem that we see a loving wife who is only interested in the welfare of her husband, but in reality she is enforcing a rigid control over his movements. An open command for him to be home or report at six would bring out his open opposition; anxiety attacks bring his submission without a struggle! The wife's hostile striving for power is disguised as “deep love.” Anxiety is usually a hidden fighting attitude that arises if a person believes he may not be able to have his own way!

WAYS OF EXPRESSING OBLIQUE HOSTILITY

Hidden hostility almost never goes unexpressed! We may have repressed all awareness of being hostile toward a person or situation but this fact will come out somehow, if only by a slip of the tongue. In situations or with persons where we dare not answer with open attack and rejection, we may speak through physical symptoms; we can broadcast our silent “No” with our organs through physical functions.

As has been said, the Ego is an organ of contact that reaches out to connect with others and with the outside world. It directs and coordinates the functions of the body to bring the individual into a position of security. Within the body, there exist three levels of functioning that support and implement the purposes of the psyche. These are the mental, biological, and chemical

processes. The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between these processes and between two Egos:

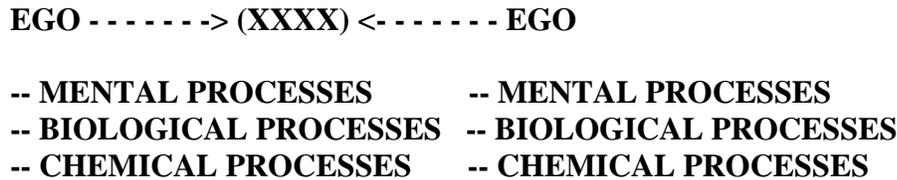


Figure 2

When an individual faces “clear sailing” (or believes he does), these processes function freely and automatically; we have no awareness of them. But a very different picture is presented if the Ego senses danger or conflict ahead. This is especially true if the hostility felt is of the submerged type (unacceptable to the Ideal Image of ourselves).

When competition (hostility) creates a feeling of distance between an individual and another (represented in diagram by XXXX), the function of the Ego is thwarted; the individual is “thrown back on himself.” The prospect of “defeat” throws the mind and body into tension which occurs (p. 60) at all levels, producing such disturbances in function as: forgetfulness, boredom, obsessive ideas, confusion, worry and anxiety, depression and blues, cramps, vomiting, blushing, sleeplessness, bed-wetting, headaches, sexual frigidity and impotence, heart palpitations, etc.

We need not work very hard to demonstrate the hostility that is hidden under such expressions. We hastily apologize to our host if we yawn in his home; and where is the wife that is not “hurt” if her husband “forgets” her birthday or anniversary! Everyone understands the significance of the above hostile rejections. It is less commonly understood that depressions, blues, and sadness are “lawsuits against God and man” -- a form of accusation and hostile attack.

At the biological level, we hide very subtle attacks on others. “Victims” of insomnia are somewhat aware of their hostility, but they ascribe their bad humor to their “sleeplessness” -- instead of realizing that they lose sleep because they are hostile toward tomorrow! By the same token, a marriage partner may lament frigidity or impotence while protesting love for the partner; the hostility expressed in the symptom is deeply hidden in the symptom.

FAVORED TRICKS FOR MAINTENANCE OF A FEELING OF SOCIAL DISTANCE

One of the most common expressions of a hostile, fighting attitude is called “hypersensitive-ness.” Where it occurs, the intention of being the favored child is very near the surface. If a hypersensitive person is even slightly put back from this favored status, he tends to become irritated and to withdraw from participation. He punishes offenders with sad looks and similar “passive attacks” or sabotage until that “offending” individual is brought under control. The hostile, ruling attitude of hypersensitive individuals is almost transparent to everyone but themselves. They are usually at a distance from useful participation -- except when they win favor by their efforts.

They depend on “the feeling of rejection” for their orientation in life. Some psychologies make much capital out of this “feeling of rejection” -- especially with what they call “the rejected child.” The handling of “rejected individuals” is an important matter. Many recommend that they be “given love” to make up for their feelings of deprivation. Unfortunately, it is not so simple. As in the case of a jealous spouse, no amount of devotion ever removes the jealousy.

The point that is overlooked is that the person who is feeling rejected has centered his attention mainly on his own feelings. He is oblivious of the fact that he himself is actively rejecting (fighting others). The problems that are created arise mostly from his active rejection -- his active sabotage of himself and those around him! Merely to give him love only serves to (p. 61) prove to him that he had just cause to feel rejected and to act against others as he did; it entrenches his desire to rule and demand. He becomes the master and we become the slaves who must do everything to supply him with favorable situations!

The only remedy for such behavior depends on centering the individual’s attention on his own rejection of others. Until he is made willing to grant favor, he must not expect to demand favor. He must become aware that he is guilty of doing exactly what he is accusing others of doing -- giving nothing! His own hostility must not go unchallenged and he must face the fact that he is rejecting 50-50 relationships and demanding only the status of the favored child.

One of the most frequent ways of blocking oneself (creating social distance) arises from our dependence on the opinion of others. This is directly behind the ubiquitous fear of failure. We fear to fail because we fear what others will think of us. Unfortunately, what we call our conscience is mostly made up of our fear of what others will think of us -- should they find out!

Here again in this mechanism, the attention of the person is only on his fear (on himself). But the important fact is his stubborn, hostile refusal to move or to act constructively! The refusal to give out in such situations is the critical issue. A simple illustration of this type of blocking is found in stage fright and the diagram in Figure 3 may be helpful in understanding it.

I – TASK AT HAND II – THE DESIRE TO RULE
(to be the favored child)
(to win approval)

III – FULL ATTENTION

Figure 3

No man can serve two masters at the same time with equal devotion. The human psyche cannot be occupied with more than one problem at a time. In life, “doing the job” is the important matter, for what we do is what others experience of us and is the basis of our human value to the community. So, doing the job is what should really count with us in all situations.

But with most of us, the urge to be the favored child is subjectively more important than is making our contribution to others. Thus, if we arise to make a speech, we try to pursue two objectives at the same time: (1) to make the speech; (2) to win approval. Each of us pursues the

one that is “nearest his heart.” If winning approval is over-valued by us, our (p. 62) attention will be badly split as we arise to speak. Most of our attention will be on the fear of failure (on praise-blame) and then trouble lies ahead.

This can be expressed as a mathematical formula: Let 100 per cent represent one’s full capacity for paying attention when he is not distracted by anything. From this, we must subtract the amount of attention he gives to his need for approval. What remains is the effective thought he has to give to doing his job. According to the diagram, III minus II equals I. In the case of severe stage fright, the individual is so occupied with his need for approval that he has insufficient attention left to give to remembering his speech; it is “forgotten.”

The active hostility hidden in this fear of the opinions of others is habitually overlooked. The desire for a favored child status must of necessity generate hostility because others may thwart our desire. We are hostile to the audience when we arise to make the speech -- lest they do not approve. We are not mainly interested in giving them our speech; we are more intent on getting their approval! This Getting-Attitude is hostile and exploitative.

It is not, then, the fear of the opinion of others that really causes the trouble, it is our hostile decision not to contribute in situations where we are uncertain of approval! In all such situations, we move painfully and with brakes set. It is our actively rejecting attitude that makes what appears to be a block in our intelligence.

There is one other aspect of this concern about others’ opinions that must be considered. Individuals who so occupy themselves simply do not know how to mind their own business! They are always listening and snooping into the reactions of others. But far worse than this, they are actively engaged in efforts at controlling the opinions of others. They try to make a good impression instead of just humbly, doing the best job they know how to do! Trying to make a good impression is a hostile activity the purpose of which is the subordination and control of the other fellow. It is an unfriendly desire to get the upper hand of him and to put him in a weaker position to us; we want “to shine in his eyes” and want him to “look up to us.” The Bill of Rights under the Constitution of the United States gives the right for each of us to think our own thoughts, but the favored child wants to force us to think only good things of him. We must always agree with his good opinion of himself or be willing to have a fight on our hands.

Those of us who fear disapproval (i.e., all of us) should close our ears to praise! If we train ourselves not to be puffed-up by praise, we shall not be downcast by blame. Let us, rather, be content always to do our best in all situations and then allow others to like or reject our contribution as they choose. Then we need not be hostile, blocked, nor try to control the opinions of others. (p. 63)

MIRRORED HOSTILITY

A very common trick for keeping at a distance from others is to see them as hostile to us and to others. A very shy man, for example, went with a companion to a party. They sat in a far corner and did not make any attempt to mix with the guests who were having a fine time mingling in the middle of the room. After a while the man turned to his companion and

complained, "What an unfriendly bunch!"

This is a perfect example of the hostility hidden under shyness (the desire to be a favored child). When others did not seek him out he accused them of the hostility that he was feeling "as if" it were they who were the hostile individuals! Had he not been hostile he would not have hidden in the corner and expected them to seek his company. But he had no awareness of his hostility because he had projected it onto them. In reality, he was looking at himself in a mirror.

This common habit of attributing our own hostility to others can become so pronounced that others are viewed as being very dangerous to us. There are two stages to this projection. In the first, we ascribe such hostility only to "strangers." As a result, we do not make new friends. Later, as we become more hostile, we ascribe hostility even to our friends so that we become entirely removed from making any helpful efforts in society. By that time we have become incapable of seeing any fault or aggressions on our part and we feel free to attack others obliquely or openly -- but always with bitterness.

FEELINGS OF WEAKNESS

Many individuals have Ideal Images of themselves as such nice people that they dare not express any degree of open anger. To do so would be too contradictory to their Ideal Image and they could not endure the contradiction. When such individuals are faced with a situation that angers them, they suddenly feel weak (instead of showing anger). That there may be a biological basis for such behavior is indicated, for example, in the fact that the opossum pretends death if he is overpowered. The effectiveness of this method depends on the fact that few will attack a fallen enemy. The "weak" person is picked up and carried by others. So, "feelings of weakness" are a form of passive, oblique hostility aimed at getting our own way; we become the favored child by a detour or trick.

Neurotic behavior is a form of masked aggression in which the person insists that he is blameless. Both the one suffering neurosis and those around him are victims of his unrecognized hostility. The individual behaves as if he were "without authority" (blame) [responsibility or accountability]. He must maintain the illusion that he is a martyr and without power to alter the course of events (p. 64) in which he is involved. His is the role of innocent victim, because he has submerged from his awareness all of his own aggression. He believes it is an unseen force that drives him into disaster; not his hidden hostility.

SIDE-SHOW OF NEUROSIS:
(Symptoms establish “alibi” for
Retreat from Main Tent)

ALCOHOL

Advance
Toward
the
Rear

CHILDHOOD SITUATION:

Child experiences his weakness and sets up his Goal of Ideal Expectation (what he hopes to find in future life). The neurotic wants to be granted Special Privilege rather than be a fellow-man.

**FICTIONAL GOAL OF
IDEAL EXPECTATION:**
(to be the Favored Child)

RESERVED SEAT
(for the Prince)

MAIN TENT OF COMMUNITY LIVING

SEX ASSOCIATION WORK

Life problems solved only by Cooperation:
(no “reserved seats” for Favored Children)

Price of Admission to Main Tent:
50-50 RELATIONSHIPS

NOTE: Unable to reach goal of being a Favored Child and unwilling to cooperate as an equal, the neurotic rejects participation in Main Tent. He “makes an advance toward the rear” to set up a Side Show of symptoms that establish his alibi for responsibilities of Main Tent

Figure 4

Alcoholism [drug abuse and addiction] is a disturbance that gives us a very clear picture of how this works. It is considered as an escape. This implies that the alcoholic is hostile toward something, otherwise he would need no escape. Adler pointed out that we have only three problems in life: work, sex, and friend- (p. 65) ship, under the Main Tent of Community Life. The alcoholic is always in a serious conflict with one if not all three of these problems; he is “giving” very little to any of them. The chart in Figure 4 may help in understanding the dynamics involved.

The feeling of being rejected is almost always a main complaint of the alcoholic. And by this token (as pointed out earlier) he is actively rejecting the need to contribute in the main tent of life. He wants to be a favored child and cannot find the amount of approval he seeks from others there. He gets progressively angry at life under the main tent because it is so unlike his ideal expectations of life. As his hostility (frustration) grows, he tends to make what Adler calls “the advance toward the rear.” Here he sets up a side show tent (safely distant from people in the main tent). This for him is alcohol but for the non-alcoholic neurotic, it becomes some other kind of compulsive preoccupation. In every neurosis, however, the side show is present. It is designed to the exact size and intensity to make it seem impossible for the “victim” to return to his job under the main tent.

The alcoholic believes that he is pulled by unseen forces into the side show of alcoholism. The reality is that his hostility toward those under the main tent is so great that he must blot out his anger by the unconsciousness produced by drink. It is the horrors of sobriety (the need to contribute and be useful) that he must avoid by getting drunk.

The craving for special privilege is hidden in his ideal expectations. This ideal goal was “dreamed” as a compensation to the frustrations of his childhood situation. Because these demands cannot be satisfied in real life, he can find their approximation only in the side show. He arranges a pseudo-fight which he uses as a reason for not approaching the real problems that exist under the main tent. The pseudo-fight is arranged by him so that it cannot be won; he sets up the “need” to drink and then sets against it the “need” to stop drinking! He is thus able to avoid the social arenas of life where he feels sure he can never be appreciated as he wishes, and he retains his basic hostility. In the role of a man who is without blame he is clearly a martyr and the helpless victim of alcohol. The deep hostility implicit in his goal of being the favored child is hidden and he feels entirely blameless. And because he is self-deceived, he cannot correct his error that is bringing him to blameless self-destruction.

HOW OUR LANGUAGE HELPS US WITH OUR SELF-DECEPTION

Since it is so important for each of us to maintain his Ideal Image unsullied by any recognition of our own hostility, it is not surprising that we have conspired with our language to help with such deception. Words can be very clever tools for hiding meanings and purposes -- as has been (p. 66) shown by General Semantics. Language is invaluable in helping us hide hostile motives, as when we “butter-up” someone before asking for a loan, especially if we do not intend to repay it. Words are equally useful in “buttering-up” things before we present them to ourselves! Only in this way can we keep our haloes on straight while we attack another.

Adler realized perfectly the danger of deception arising from language. To protect us from both self-deception and deception by others, he gave us the command to “trust only movement.” On this point he was uncompromising. It was his just contention that what we do is what affects others -- not what we say. If our acts are hostile, then we cannot sincerely be opposed to their effect. What we do is what we really mean. But we use language to hide the fact and to make it appear that we are above reproach.

Put your fingers in your ears and watch whether a person moves toward or moves away from another person or situation, said Adler. In short, there are but two movements possible for a human being to make; he either accepts or rejects; he says “yes” or “no”! Our emotions and our emotion-words are only the steam we place behind our movement!

Fortunately for the human race, the nervous system of an individual is not able to debate the fine nuances of language and subtle shades of verbalisms. It knows only two words and is equipped by evolution to respond only to two commands: they are “to advance” or “to retreat.” We cannot do both at the same time.

Adler called neurosis, “Yes, -- But.” By this he meant that in neurosis we agree verbally to move forward, but because we are inwardly rejecting a forward move, we transmit a silent No to

the nervous system. What comes out in movement is the “No.”

In our language we have almost countless words and expressions that, when they are abstracted, simply mean either “yes” or “no.” One could compile volumes of linguistic subterfuges that are habitually used to hide the truth of our yes-no neuro-muscular answers. But everyone who wishes to help develop himself or others must compile his own list of tainted words. We shall only indicate a few here that are abstracted by the nervous system and turned into movement toward, or away from.

Forward-moving Words: Love, admire, like, friendly, hope, happy, pleased, glad, smiling, enthusiastic, interested, curious, confident, attentive, accepting, etc.

Moving-away-from Words: Sad, dejected, disappointed, glum, angry, lazy, hostile, frustrated, depressed, blue, nervous, fearful, timid, hateful, spiteful, apathetic, anxious, resistant, numb, jealous, envious, etc.

The importance of reducing all language to “yes-no” words cannot be over-estimated. It saves us from getting lost in verbal jungles. One of the best examples of how easily we can get lost is to be found in the confusion that exists about the word “anxiety.” It is considered by many almost as if (p. 67) it were a Thing-in-Itself that had a life of its own, quite different from most other emotions. At times, it has been considered as “free-floating” anxiety as if it were a ghost without a house to haunt! Such concepts only serve to obscure thinking and therapy.

There is no difference at the level of the nervous system between anxiety and hostility for they are but two words for the same rejecting movement! Both are ways of saying “No.” A person who dares not express his hostility openly merely submerges it and expresses it as “anxiety.” But he is just as non-cooperative whether he expresses it at one or the other level! If then, we call “free-floating anxiety” the same thing as a generally hostile attitude toward functioning as an equal member in a situation, we can easily see how it serves to win a position of special privilege for an individual. Experience with such individuals teaches us not to expect participation and contribution from them and we treat them as favorite children. This concept of anxiety is easy to show because the only times such individuals are relatively free of their “anxieties” is when they are in a pampering situation in which nothing is expected and all is given to them freely -- as they wish it.

Anxiety, then, is repressed anger over the prospect of situations that might result in frustrated aggressions. In a sense, the person tends to get angry in advance! It is found in those who think of themselves as being “weak” and it is associated with a strong tendency to disparage; they trust neither themselves nor others.

Like anxiety, “guilt-feelings” are often placed in a special category and given very precious significance. Again, we are only dealing with a rejecting-attitude which a person can use as an excuse for non-participation! Adler’s delightful answer to all the pother about “guilt-feelings” was, “Either do wrong -- or feel sorry, but don’t do both because it is too much work!” In this one short sentence, he brought to light the hostile rejecting core of guilt-feelings and stripped from it the pretence of apology!

The whole concept of transference and resistance also seems needlessly magnified and confused by verbiage. In reality, they are old acquaintances, “yes-no” in an academic cap and gown.

Let us examine other instances in which language can be used to hide hostility. A martyr-like individual remarked, “If someone does me wrong, I always forgive -- but I never forget!” How easily we can fool ourselves by such phrases into believing we are without hostility. This same person (as might be expected) removes himself as much as possible from all human association!

Watch only movement when someone says he wants to help mankind, but that first he must overcome his nervousness with strangers. Nervousness is just another term for hostility. We should not be fooled because it sounds better to label someone a “nervous type” than it does to call him (p. 68) a hostile, irritable person. The difference (at the level of the nervous system) is exactly that between Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

Then there is that high-sounding phrase, “sense of duty.” It is surcharged with latent animosity and usually breaks out into recriminations sooner or later. Even on the face of it we see that the person is doing something that he would not do unless he were being forced. The person who “does his duty” is not doing it for the joy of self-expression nor the desire to enrich another. He expects recognition and approval. In short, he demands subordination from those he serves. Should this be denied him, hostile accusations of ingratitude are hotly thrown and the fight for domination comes into the open.

“Clumsiness” is another word that does not sound particularly hostile, but in reality it hides a lot of anger. The clumsy person is very self-conscious; he believes that others have nothing to do but watch him while he bungles things. This betrays his accusing hostile attitude. He moves with his brakes half-set so that his tense muscles refuse to respond automatically when he should “move toward” others.

Adler said, “If we had to have a rule for swallowing, we would choke to death.” Movements must be automatic. But the clumsy person is intent on trying to make a good impression. In this hostile frame of mind, he tries to control his muscles and thus destroys his automatic coordination. His hostility is expressed at the biological level in tense muscles, but his escutcheon is free of any awareness of his submerged anger at others (who may find fault with him).

For another example, we may take the word “respect.” A parent may say that he wants his child to respect him, but he would never think of saying that he wants his child to fear him. It would not suit his Ideal Image to realize that he wants to rule, to dominate, to control the child. Examination discloses mutual hate existing between those who complain of a “lack of respect” between one another. We may like to believe that there are important intellectual differences between such words as respect, fear, hate, disobedience, distrust, but to the nervous system, they all mean “No.” When they are in the picture, we remain blocked in relation to one another.

Stupidity is often a clever mask for hidden hostility. There are many children who appear to be unable to do certain school subjects whereas they may be able enough in others. Reading, for

example, is one of the most frequent sources of school failures. It is unfortunate that people commonly believe this difficulty arises from some mental incapacity in the child. As a result, remedial reading techniques are usually attacks aimed at the mental level or mental processes of the child. Approached from this angle any progress is usually glacial in its speed and the “stupidity” seems impregnable. (p. 69)

What has really happened in such cases is that we are dealing with a rejected child, not a stupid child. Because of early defeats and irritations he has become openly or secretly hostile to reading and to those who wish to teach him. Stupidity is a cloak for his refusal to participate further toward the goal of reading and a way of defeating those who try to force him to move in the direction he has come to hate. It is his submerged hostility rather than any lack of capacity that stops him from learning to read. And only as his hostility is overcome does he finally move forward.

The relationship between sadness, blues, depression, and glumness is often disregarded; they are all expressions of hostility. A person may “feel blue” with a clear conscience, but he would resist admitting that his “blues” are suppressed rage that followed an uncomplimentary remark made about him. He would not like to admit that he was petty enough to be angered by a passing breath of air.

Likewise, every timid person wants to believe that he is (inside) the very soul of friendliness toward others. He maintains that it is they who ignore him. His hostile unwillingness to meet others half way is hidden from his eyes; he wants always to be the guest but never the host in a relationship. His “fears” are more absorbing to him than the people around him who might profit from his attention and contribution. We like to imagine that fears are something respectable, though unfortunate, that hold us powerless in their grasp! But -- what we fear we hate, and what we hate we fear; there is no difference. The negation of contribution is the common denominator of both.

To overcome a “fear,” we must give up our refusal to move toward the person or thing we are rejecting! There is no other royal road for overcoming fears. If a person, for example, fears public speaking, there is no magic that will cure him. He must give up his stubborn refusal to speak when he is asked. Once he is willing to move in that direction, he soon learns the knack. And only then do the final traces of resistance (fear) begin to disappear. A hostile dependence on the opinion of others is the cause of many a “mute, inglorious Milton.”

The important factor about any “fear” that is used as an alibi, then, is that it masks a positive decision on the part of an individual, his decision not to move in the direction of the thing toward which he is hostile! If we “fear,” we are not, then, the victim of some imponderable compulsion beyond our control that takes hold of our destiny in a way beyond our consent. This is, of course, the way it “feels” and the way we wish to make it appear to ourselves. We do not wish to see that it is a definite decision made by us not to participate in certain ways or in certain areas. To accept this fact would put the whole matter under our personal responsibility (where we do not want it). If we wish to escape the burden of irrational fears, we must give up believing in their mystical nature and accept (p. 70) the inescapable fact that we have made a decision which is hostile toward the subject of our fear: we refuse to learn and to participate in that direction. In short, fear

and hostility are the same thing.

HOW TO HANDLE HIDDEN HOSTILITY (OBLIQUE HOSTILITY)

If, as we have said, the Ideal Image leads us to resist recognition of our hidden hostility, how then can we become aware of it by an effort of our own will? The fact is that there will be little incentive on our part to disclose our hidden hostility as long as things are going well for us; it is the other fellow who is the most disturbed by us under such circumstances. But the time may come when we, too, begin to feel the pinch. And in spite of the rationalizations we make for our behavior, we may not be able to escape the realization that we may be somewhat at fault ourselves. In such a case, we may undertake to uncover our own hostility.

At such a time, the help of a good friend or a therapist may assist us in discovering our unfriendliness toward others. But if this is lacking, we may always learn to “read our tensions.” As has been shown, our hidden hostility always betrays its presence in some disturbance of mental, biological or chemical functioning. Investigation of such disturbance will lead us to our hidden hostilities if we are willing to follow their trail. If we have been accustomed to develop a headache when we have a conference with the boss, for example, and have blamed it on the stuffiness of the air in his office, we might rather begin to examine our attitudes toward him. The chances are that we will find that we are deeply angry because we are not his favored child around the office! In short, we must accept the fact that every tension has its “good” reason and its real reason! The first is the one we invent to prevent any damage to our Ideal Image; the second is the true source of our distress which we wish to hide from our awareness.

There are three main steps to be followed in overcoming our blind spots. They are as follows:

1. The first step is to chart in our own minds the various tensions and disturbances of function as we experience them and note the “good reason” we have invented for each of them. Then we must begin to look for the “real reason” behind each tension. Find out what is excluded in terms of fuller participation by each tension and who is hindered or damaged by our refusal to participate. We must accept this hostility as belonging to oneself.

2. The next step is for us to contrast this hostility-picture against the Ideal Image we have of ourselves. (Compare the picture on the shelf with the candid snapshot.) Begin to eliminate the Ideal Image, bit by bit, by fusing the two images together. We must get accustomed to the idea that (p. 71) we are not always “Men of Good Will.” Step by step, we must begin to see ourselves as others see us!

3. The final step is the full acceptance of the hostility we feel for those around us as our creation and not just an imponderable force outside our skins!

These steps alone will not put us at the helm in full command of our psychic forces. When we are hostile, we shall express it with full awareness of what we are doing to ourselves and others. We shall not longer pretend that we are without blame for our actions. Since we can never escape responsibility for our actions, regardless of how good an alibi we may contrive, we can deal in calculated risks rather than take chances of tripping over our hidden hates.

CONSCIOUS EGO-CONTROL OF HIDDEN HOSTILITY

Only with our hidden hates kept under the spotlight of full awareness can we hope to be safe from the hidden and oblique projection of such hatred. As long as we are conscious of our hidden demand to be a favored child, we can control its manifestations when otherwise it would be “anti-survival” to express them unmodified by insight. In short, it would be easier and safer in the end to quit a job we hated rather than to develop an ulcer which might perforate and kill us! And if we must visit our in-laws, we might just as well do so hating them consciously as to develop a splitting headache as an excuse to leave a half hour early. Since it is so easy for others to see our hostilities, why should we be the last or only ones to be unaware of them? Difficult as it may be to adjust to a situation if we are filled with conscious resentment, it is still far more painful to do it if we maintain the hatred at a submerged level.

The number of self-designated Men of Good Will shrinks rapidly under this process of exposing hidden hostility. But by the same token, there will be fewer “church deacons building spite fences next to their neighbors’ windows.” And there will be less “righteous” indignation expressed and therefore fewer bitter, deadly quarrels. We shall not be so maliciously gleeful when a fellow-man is discovered to be in error. The conscious awareness of our own hatefulness will temper our attacks on others. In time we should have more “happy sinners” and fewer “sad-eyed saints.”

NOTE TO GROUP THERAPISTS

The viewpoint regarding hidden hostilities and the three steps toward clarification mentioned above can be easily used as a basis of group therapy. As a matter of fact, a group is a dynamic and effective instrument, much more compelling than individual consultation. Adler pointed out that all (p. 72) human faculties developed because we live in groups. “All human problems are social problems in a social setting, and there are no other problems,” states Adler. Where, then, can one understand human relationships better than in a group experience?

The preparation of a group for such discussions is to give the members the concept embodied above. Members of the group quickly grasp the concept of the Ideal Image and easily learn to spot the fictitious superiority put forth by others -- even though each is oblivious of his own. The same is true of hidden and oblique manifestations of hostility. It does not take long before they can see the dichotomy between the Ideal Image and the real behavior of others.

With equal ease, they soon learn the knack of turning equivocal language into “yes-no” words. They learn to “trust only movement.”

The group as a whole, then, becomes a mirror in which each may see himself as others see him -- his truer image. He can see how he fights and twists to steal a position of the favored child at the expense of others. This exploitative attitude can be compared against an ideal attitude of fair play. All can see how far removed from playing fairly is the striving of himself and others in the group. The hostility-quotient of each is thus disclosed.

By this approach, the group itself becomes the therapist. This is a distinctive advantage for training in interpersonal relationships. And it helps destroy tendencies to make “transferences to a father-figure” on whom one may continue to lean to avoid becoming self-reliant.

We should clearly understand the difference between this kind of group therapy and the kind where a “therapist” treats patients in a group. In the latter case, he is the dominant figure on whom the others lean. They repress themselves to a sub-dominant position of childlike dependency. As his “inferiors,” they dare not express openly their hostility toward the therapist. He may attack them but they may not attack him in return. Thus the “feeling of weakness” (hostility) may not come to light.

But where the group-as-a-whole is the therapist, no father-figure need exist. As a matter of fact, no one may be allowed to hold such a position in the group with impunity. The chairman of the group may not be placed above the common level and he must not be tabu if caught in expressions of his own hidden hostility. Each session thus conducted becomes a treatment for all present -- even the “leader.” Each is exposed in any tendency he may manifest to seek the status of a favored child:

There is not much chance for a “holier than thou” attitude to flourish because everyone is made aware that such a trend is part of the basic hostility of the individual. This is fortunate, for it prevents the development of “halo-pressure” some people get from merely “learning psychology.” And it prevents the substitution of the “analysis” for the original neurosis (hostility). Too often, an analysis becomes only another form of (p. 73) fictitious superiority without the individual being any more aware of his submerged hostility toward others than before. The job is properly done only when we know ourselves for what we truly are!

In this approach to group therapy, the whole group works on the problem of spotting oblique hostilities. There is small chance that any may go unnoticed!

The function of the leader is only to introduce the original concepts and to guide the participants long enough for them to find the knack of spotting oblique hostilities. From that point onward, all are on their own responsibility and subject to the pressures of interaction that arise in all interpersonal contacts.

Where there are no masters and no slaves, all must face equality -- which ‘is ‘only the need to be productive! A proper group experience ‘allows no one to abase nor to exalt himself. The need to share and share alike is the therapeutic agent implicit in a group. (p. 74)

* Beecher, Willard. (1949). Oblique Hostility. *Individual Psychology Bulletin*, 7, 51-74.

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