



## Book Review

### The Courage to be Disliked

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**Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga (2018)**, *The Courage to be Disliked*, Atlantic Books, Pages 228, ISBN: 1760638269, 9781760638269

Amid our daily struggles and tangled relationships, life often feels complicated and overwhelming. But what if the key to a simpler, more fulfilling life lies in our hands? 'The Courage to Be Disliked' by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga explores this idea, drawing on the wisdom of psychologist Alfred Adler. The book, a brilliant self-help manual, depicts the clues for a happy life through a conversation between two men, a philosopher and a seeker, who ponder upon Adler's principles in a modern context. These men discuss various theories, phenomena and examples across five conversations and illuminate a profound wisdom: perceived complications of life are our own making.

The book guides people to challenge their lens of viewing the world and upgrade their lives as it navigates through the intricate theories of separation of tasks, inferiority complex, and contribution to society, given by Adler in the 1900s. Adler was an Austrian psychiatrist who sought to revolutionise the understanding of an individual. He was one of the crucial figures in the development of Psychoanalysis - a prominent school of thought in Psychology. However, Adler diverged from Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung by emphasising the significance of an individual's social context and the pursuit of superiority as primary motivators in human behaviour. The authors encourage using Adler's theories to enhance our daily lives, presenting ideas through a Socratic dialogue in a relatable manner. Using this dialogue, the book embarks on a deeply

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introspective journey, challenging conventional wisdom while imparting fresh perspectives on how we perceive and navigate our world.

The book commences with a young man who bravely questions the philosopher's beliefs in life's simplicity and bears his challenges with personal value and a lingering sense of scepticism. In the book, he provides examples, seeks understanding from the philosopher, and engages in arguments. In contrast, the philosopher serves as a calm and patient guide, responding passionately to the young man's concerns. Addressing his issues, the philosopher presents three critical solutions to free life: self-acceptance, confidence, and societal contribution.

Expanding on the potency of the present moment and the individual's responsibility for transforming their own life, the Philosopher first clarifies, "We are not determined by our experiences, but the meaning we give them is self-determining". He teaches how the hold of trauma, and often our past, has become an unconscious driving force wherein, through one's experiences, one satisfies present goals of unsatisfactory living. Living based on current goals is fundamental to Adlerian psychology. A goal of not wanting to go out and be social, for example, is satisfied by the reasons of having fear and anxiety for the same. It thus sees a shift from aetiology (causes and origins) to teleology (purposes and goals). Rather than a bad childhood experience shaping our life, the book shows us the necessity to change our view on any aspect and utilise the present experience to improve.

He later highlights the significance of interpersonal relationships and the challenges that stem from them. The philosopher underscores the tendency to compare oneself to societal standards, causing feelings of inadequacy. Whether it's about height or competence, he emphasises the need to explore feelings of inferiority or superiority in one's life journey rather than engaging in comparisons with others. Constant competition and a sense of inferiority, he contends, complicate one's peace of mind. This explanation reinforces the idea of abandoning the futile pursuit of comparing oneself to others and emphasises the necessity to discard the lens of winning or losing.

The philosopher then introduces the concept of the separation of tasks. In essence, what others think of us is confined to their perception, while our responsibility lies in regulating our perception of life events. The book's central principle, 'the courage to be disliked,' becomes pivotal, granting true freedom by dismissing concerns about others' opinions. Refraining from meddling in others' tasks, one achieves harmony with one's ideal self in society—a symbol of living by one's principles. This premise prompts a crucial question, as answered in the book: does a parent hindering a child's learning potentially harm the child by interfering with their self-perception and autonomy?

Separating tasks among family and friends fosters selflessness, crucial for community contribution. Viewing the community as an infinite connection to the past, future, and universe, including inanimate objects, eradicates loneliness. This emphasises the importance of equality in relationships, advocating for a horizontal perspective rather than a vertical one. Regardless of age, gender, class, or caste, viewing every person as a well-meaning comrade rather than superior or inferior is crucial. Instead of interfering in each other's tasks, fostering encouragement is the optimal way to empower one another. The book underscores practical areas where unconscious competition hinders relationships, including communication. This emphasises the need for heightened awareness in understanding our relations and uncovering unconscious meanings within them.

The philosopher's pinnacle centres on the key to happiness—'being beneficial to all.' This provides a sense of contributing to society and offers satisfaction and direction amid existential questioning. Happiness, portrayed as empowering, enables individuals to confront adversity with patience and strength. The book underscores the significance of concentrating on life's kinetic energy, describing it as a journey to be relished through a mindful presence rather than a mere series of moments.

'The courage to be normal' holds the key to happiness. Life, inherently meaningless, derives its truth from the meaning we attribute to it. One can find fulfilment in being present in the here

and now by aiming to contribute to society without succumbing to competition or self-comparison.

The book adeptly introduced Adler's intricate concepts to the modern world, simplifying them with clarity and a smooth narrative structure. However, despite their apparent simplicity, these concepts can be easily overlooked in daily life. To effectively implement Adlerian principles, consistency and self-recording are crucial. The book or readers could incorporate daily journaling and self-reflection to track the separation of tasks, cultivate the 'I' perspective, and prioritise a balanced work-life dynamic.

Adlerian psychology ultimately advocates for simple, purposeful living, offering an 'ideal' understanding of the world. However, a notable drawback lies in the book's oversight of the intricate impact of social and economic surroundings on individuals. Only some have the means to pursue self-improvement as portrayed. The emphasis on the self-limits the target audience, excluding those lacking resources or motivation. Additionally, addressing trauma and managing anger are presented with limited examples, insufficient given the multi-dimensional nature of these issues. The book's portrayal through several examples only partially justifies its stance on sensitive issues.

'The Courage to Be Disliked' compellingly explores life's complexities, drawing on Adler's wisdom for insights into achieving simplicity and fulfilment. Through Adler's theories like the 'separation of tasks' and 'contribution to society,' the book challenges conventional perspectives, guiding readers on a journey of self-discovery. The Socratic dialogue and relatable examples enhance accessibility, although a more nuanced exploration could be beneficial. Nevertheless, the book advocates for self-acceptance, healthy relationships, and happiness through meaningful contribution, serving as a valuable resource for those pursuing a purposeful and straightforward life.