

Is Humanity Doomed? – Carl Jung on Healing a Sick Society

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by [Academy of Ideas](#)

March 22, 2022

The following is a transcript of this video.

“Anxiously we look round for collective measures, thereby reinforcing the very mass-mindedness we want to fight against. There’s only one remedy for the leveling effect of all collective measures, and this is to emphasize and increase the value of the individual.”

Carl Jung, Civilization in Transition

We live in an age where two visions of the world are colliding. On the one hand, there is the vision of freedom. In this vision we have the autonomy to shape our own life and to live in accordance with our own goals. Where the vision of freedom reigns, the rule of law is not an arbitrary expression of state power, but is shaped around the ideal that we may live as we wish so long as we do not aggress against the person or property of another.

*“Freedom is the right to live as we wish,” said Epictetus
“Nothing else.”*

Epictetus

The vision of freedom is clashing with what the American economist Thomas Sowell has termed the vision of the anointed. In this vision the global population is to be divided into two classes: the rulers and the ruled. The rulers consist of politicians, high level bureaucrats, crony capitalists, select members of the scientific community, and the mainstream media. These individuals conceive of themselves, in the words of Sowell, as *“an anointed elite, a people with a mission to lead others in one way or another toward [what they conceive as] better lives.”* (Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*) The ruled, in this vision, are not to be granted the autonomy to control their own lives, but are to *“be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-ridden, regulated, penned up, indoctrinated, preached at, checked, appraised, seized, censured”* (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon), and commanded in every realm of life, so that the anointed class can attempt to actualize their idea of a brave new world.

This video is written for those who still value freedom and who do not wish to be pawns in the dark twisted fantasy of a power-hungry ruling class. Relying on the insights of Carl Jung, we are going to explore how positive social change, in the direction of a freer world, can be effectuated by individuals striving for what Jung called the achievement of personality. For as Jung notes when a world is hurtling toward authoritarian, or totalitarian rule:

“. . .such problems are never solved by legislation or by tricks. They are solved only by a general change of attitude. And the change does not begin with propaganda and mass meetings, or with violence. It begins with a change in individuals. It will continue as a transformation of their personal likes and dislikes, of their outlook on life and of their values, and only the accumulation of these individual changes will produce a collective solution.”

Carl Jung, Psychology and Religion

This solution can ring hollow and feel disheartening. For if we must wait around for individuals to change, will we not be waiting a lifetime? Is there not a quicker means to stop the rise of authoritarianism? But when it is understood what Jung meant by the achievement of personality, we will see that this solution is more powerful than at first it might appear and Jung was not alone in this belief, for as Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

“The antidote to this abuse of formal government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson

So what is the growth of the individual or the achievement of personality? According to Jung it is *“the optimum development of the whole individual human being.”* (Carl Jung, *Development of Personality*) It is, in other words, to self-actualize, to realize one’s potential and to transcend one’s current limitations in pursuit of greater possibilities. *“It is impossible to foresee the endless variety of conditions that have to be fulfilled,”* wrote Jung. *“A whole lifetime, in all its biological, social, and spiritual aspects, is needed. Personality is the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being.”* (Carl Jung, *Development of Personality*) In the brevity of a human life we can only ever approach the ideal of completely actualizing our potential, but as Jung points out *“unattainability is no argument against the ideal, for ideals are only signposts, never the goal.”* (Carl Jung, *Development of Personality*) When we make progress toward this ideal, we cease being an ordinary member of the great mass of conformists and become, in the words of Jung, extra-ordinary. But what, asks Jung *“induces a man to go his own way and to rise out of unconscious identity with the mass? . . .What is it. . .that . . .tips the scales in favour*

of the extra-ordinary?" (Carl Jung, Development of Personality)

Achievement of personality is attained not merely by setting the goal to self-actualize, rather integral to this process is the possession of a vocation. A vocation, as Jung explains, is the crucial *"factor that destines a man to emancipate himself from the herd and from its well-worn paths."* (Carl Jung, *Development of Personality*) To be in possession of a vocation means to turn within and listen to the call of conscience in order to discover our purpose, or life's mission. For as Jung explains our conscience is the inner voice that provides us with *"a special form of "knowledge" . . . or certainty about, the emotional value of the ideas we have concerning the motives of our actions."* (Carl Jung, *Civilization in Transition*) The call of conscience might direct us in the pursuit of a bold goal, the furtherance of a cause, or the defense of cherished values, and as Viktor Frankl writes:

". . .only to the extent to which a man commits himself to the fulfilment of his life's meaning [i.e., his vocation], to this extent he also actualizes himself. In other words, self-actualization cannot be attained if it is made an end in itself, but only as a side effect of the self-transcendence [that is guided by a vocation]." (Viktor Frankl)

Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning

If we discover our vocation and use it to guide us in the achievement of personality how does this help defeat the totalitarian aspirations of the anointed class and bring freedom to an unfree world? How does going our own way and spurring conformity in favour of following what Jung called the "law of our own being" help cure the sickness of our society? Or as Jung asks:

"What has the individual personality to do with the plight of the many?"

Carl Jung, Development of Personality

Firstly, the state of a society is dependent on the health or sickness, and strength or weakness, of the individuals that compose it. If a society is composed of mainly weak, passive, neurotic and cowardly individuals, then it is easily manipulated and controlled by a ruling class. A society that is to be free, and a society that is to flourish, must consist of more individuals, in the words of the historians Will and Ariel Durant, *"with clarity of mind and energy of will. . .capable of effective responses to new situations."* (*Lessons of History*) Or as Nietzsche wrote *"the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men [are] the pillars of a strong civilization"*. (*Nietzsche, The Dawn*) These traits are promoted by the achievement of personality.

But with this increased strength of character comes an increased appetite for freedom. For it is weak individuals with little going in life who desire paternalistic, or authoritarian government, and as Jung wrote:

"It is perhaps a humiliating sign of spiritual immaturity that [modern] man needs, and wants, a large measure of authority."

Carl Jung, The Practice of Psychotherapy

Those in possession of a vocation quickly discover that they are far better equipped to be the masters of their destinies than is any bureaucrat or politician.

In addition to creating the type of individuals needed for a flourishing society, the achievement of personality can also spark an organic movement in defense of freedom. To understand how this occurs, we will contrast how the call of conscience differs at times when freedom reigns versus times when a society is flirting with authoritarian, or full-blown

totalitarian rule.

In a free society, the call of conscience will direct people down many different paths. Some will be called to vocations in the arts, sciences, philosophy, or politics, others will build businesses, some will gravitate in the direction of sports, entertainment, or adventure, while still others will adopt more personal vocations such as creating a strong family. This great variety of vocational pursuits increases the number of things tried and so helps a culture develop and a civilization advance. But when freedom recedes and with it life's opportunities, the call of conscience can act as a harmonizing force directing people toward vocations that defend freedom. For we are not suited to live in the sickness of total government control and so feel naturally averse to its emergence. So long as we have not been stripped of our desire to live, we instinctively will seek ways to escape from this pathological form of rule.

At first it is only an intrepid few who recognize the gravity of the situation and so are called to vocations that defend freedom. These individuals, in the words of Jung, *"are called awake by the summons of the voice [of conscience], whereupon they are at once set apart from the others, feeling themselves confronted with a problem about which the others know nothing."* (Carl Jung, *Development of Personality*) As the distorted nature of the vision of the anointed becomes more obvious, this call of conscience directing people toward vocations that can help freedom prevail reaches a louder pitch.

". . . deep down, below the surface of the average man's conscience," writes Jung "he hears a voice whispering, "There is something not right". . ."

Carl Jung, Development of Personality

This call orients people around what Soren Kierkegaard called

a 'third', or what amounts to the shared vocation of healing a sick world:

"In mutually committing [ourselves] to [a shared vocation]," writes JW "transcending ourselves in dedication toward it, we help to realize it in ourselves and each other. We form a team devoted to a shared cause . . . the shared object of passion is [the] 'third' in a relationship, the 'idea' that strongly binds two [or more] individuals."

Jeremy Weissman, The Crowdsourced Panopticon

An organic movement, composed of men and women who are bound together by the idea, or "third", of freedom, is what is needed to counteract the forward march of the vision of the anointed. For only power can thwart power and the vision of the anointed is backed by immense institutional and financial power. But the vision of freedom can be backed by an even greater power, the power of individuals possessed by a vocation and united in pursuit of a shared cause. For correcting the social ills of our day will not come from the top-down, it will not be done by government, it will come from the choices that we make as individuals and the spontaneous orders that emerge as a result.

If our conscience is telling us something is not right and that we need to take action in defense of freedom, should we heed this call? What is the alternative? Wait around for a political saviour to fix a thoroughly corrupt system? Obey and conform in the deluded belief that the anointed class has our best interests at heart? Do nothing but criticize others and lament over the state of the world? These alternatives are for the weak and the lazy.

"So much is at stake" writes Jung "and so much depends on the psychological constitution of modern man. . . Is he conscious of the path he is treading, and what the conclusions are that must be drawn from the present world situation and his own

psychic situation? . . . Does he realize what lies in store should this catastrophe ever befall him? Is he even capable of realizing that this would in fact be a catastrophe? And finally, does the individual know that he is the makeweight that tips the scales?"

Carl Jung, The Undiscovered Self

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