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أ.د/ نبيل منانـي

1945

Our Inner Conflicts

"*Living with unresolved conflicts involves primarily a devastating* waste of human energies*, occasioned not only by the conflicts themselves but by all the devious attempts to remove them.*"

"*Sometimes neurotic persons show a curious single-mindedness of purpose: men may sacrifice everything including their own dignity to their ambition; women may want nothing of life but love; parents may devote their entire interest to their children. Such persons give the impression of wholeheartedness. But, as we have shown, they are actually pursuing a mirage which appears to offer a solution of their conflicts. The apparent wholeheartedness is one of desperation rather than of integration.*"

In a nutshell

The neurotic tendencies we may have acquired in childhood are no longer necessary—if we leave them behind we can fulfill our potential.

In a similar vein

Alfred Adler *Understanding Human Nature* (p 14)
Anna Freud *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (p 104)
Melanie Klein *Envy and Gratitude* (p 180)
R. D. Laing *The Divided Self* (p 186)
Abraham Maslow *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (p 192)
Carl Rogers *On Becoming a Person* (p 238)

CHAPTER 28

Karen Horney

Karen Danielsen was in her mid-teens when Sigmund Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams*. She would later be well-known for "feminizing" the male bastion of psychoanalysis, but it took her 35 years before she even published her first book. In between she married, had three children, and obtained a PhD.

Karen Horney (pronounced "Horn-eye"), as she became, broke away from Freud in some important ways. By refuting some of his ideas such as "penis envy" and generally downplaying the supremacy of sexual motivation, she arguably brought more sense to psychoanalysis. In addition, by showing how women were vulnerable to neuroses caused by unreal cultural expectations, she gained the deserved reputation of being the first feminist psychoanalyst.

Horney differed from Freudian dogma by saying that people did not always have to be prisoners of their unconscious minds or pasts. She wanted to find the root cause of psychological issues, but largely considered them a *present* problem that could be healed. Her delineations of neurotic types, so simple and elegant, have been a significant influence on modern therapeutic practice, and her interpersonal approach and emphasis on uncovering the "real self"—with its great potential—were important influences on the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Finally, Horney wished to make the process of analysis sufficiently understandable that people could analyze themselves. In this she presaged both cognitive therapy and the self-help movement.

Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis was conceived as a book for the layperson. While trained therapists should handle severe neuroses, Horney also believed that "with untiring effort we can go ourselves a long way towards disentangling our own conflicts." It is therefore a self-help book, but a very fine one based on 40 years of keen observation of the mind's defenses. You will be a remarkable person indeed if you don't see at least part of yourself in Horney's descriptions of the three neurotic tendencies.

Conflicts and inconsistencies

According to Horney, all neurotic symptoms (which are also called "rackets") indicate an unresolved deeper conflict. Though the symptoms cause difficulties for the person in real life, it is the conflict that actually produces depression, anxiety, inertia, indecision, undue detachment, overdependence, and so on. A conflict involves inconsistencies to which the person is generally blind. For example:

- Someone who is greatly affronted by a perceived slur, when in fact none was given.
- One who apparently values another's friendship, but nevertheless steals from them.
- A woman who claims devotion to her children, yet somehow forgets their birthdays.
- A girl whose chief desire is to marry, but avoids contact with men.
- A forgiving and tolerant person to others who is nevertheless very severe on themselves.

Thing that "don't add up" like this indicate a divided personality. In relation to the mother, Horney commented that perhaps she was "more devoted to her ideal of being a good mother than to the children themselves." Or perhaps she had an unconscious sadistic tendency to frustrate her children's enjoyment. The point is that an outward issue may often indicate a deeper conflict. Consider a marriage in which there are arguments over every little thing. Is it the subject of the arguments that is the real issue, or some underlying dynamic?

How conflicts develop

Freud believed that our inner conflicts were a matter of instinctual drives coming up against the "civilized" conscience, a situation that we could never change. But Horney felt that our inner turmoil came about through conflicting notions about what we actually wanted.

For instance, children growing up in a hostile family environment want love like everyone else, but feel forced to become aggressive in order to cope. When they become adults, these genuine needs conflict with the neurotic need to control situations and people. The person they feel neurotically driven to be, tragically, is the very personality that will never deliver them what they truly want. The behaviors they have taken on have effectively become their personality, but it is a divided personality.

Rather than being about "penis envy" or the "Oedipus complex," Horney felt that adult neuroses stemmed from more basic factors such as too little love, smothering love, lack of guidance, attention, or respect for the child, conditional love, inconsistent rules, isolation from other children, a hostile atmosphere, domination, and so on. All of these make children feel that they have to make up for their insecurity in some way, developing strategies or "neurotic trends" that they carry into adulthood. Taken to extremes, neuroticism ends up creating "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" characters, divided within themselves yet tragically unaware of the division.

Horney identified three basic neurotic trends: moving toward people; moving against people; and moving away from people.

Moving toward people

This type of person experienced feelings of isolation or fear in childhood, and as a result attempted to win the affection of others in the family in order to feel safe. After several years of temper tantrums, they commonly became "nice" and docile—they found a strategy better suited to getting what they wanted.

As adults, their need for affection and approval manifests itself as a deep need for a friend, lover, husband, or wife who will "fulfill all expectations of life." The compulsive need to "secure" their chosen partner occurs irrespective of what that person feels about them. Other people seem "like strange and threatening animals" who must be won over. Through being submissive, caring, sensitive, and dependent (the other person may feel they are being "killed by kindness"), this type finds an effective way to create connections and therefore feel safe. The nature of the significant other does not actually interest them that much—deep down, they may not even like other people—the main thing is to be accepted, loved, guided by, and taken care of. Ultimately, though, the need for belonging leads to misjudgments about other people.

This type's taboo against being assertive or critical creates a "poor little me" feeling that progressively weakens them. Ironically, when they occasionally go out on a limb to be aggressive or detached, often they seem suddenly more likable. After all, their aggressive tendencies have not gone away, they have just been suppressed.

Moving against people

In childhood, such people had a hostile family environment, and chose to fight it through rebellion. They began to distrust the intentions and motivations of those around them.

Adults of this type assume the world to be basically hostile, but may have acquired "a veneer of suave politeness, fair-mindedness and good fellowship." They are benevolent as long as others submit to their command. As fearful and anxious as the compliant type, instead of choosing "belonging" as their defense against a feeling of helplessness, they choose the path of "every man for himself." They dislike weakness, particularly in themselves, and they are generally strivers for success, prestige, or recognition.

"Trust no one and never let down your guard" might be their motto. Such extreme self-interest may involve exploitation or control over others.

Moving away from people

Instead of wanting to belong or to fight, in childhood this type felt too close to those around them and tried to create distance between themselves and their family, retreating into a secret world of toys or books or wishes for the future.

As adults, they have a neurotic need for detachment from the world that is quite distinct from a genuine wish for solitude, or a wish not to get

emotionally involved with anyone, whether in love or conflict. This group may get on well with other people superficially, as long as their "magic circle" is not penetrated, and may live very simply so as not to have to work hard for others and so lose control of their life. Able to live in "splendid isolation" because of a feeling of superiority over others and a belief in their uniqueness, they have a terror of being forced into joining a group, having to become gregarious, or engaging in common chit-chat at a party.

Together with these features comes a craving for privacy and independence, and a hatred of anything that involves coercion or obligation, such as marriage or financial debt. Such people are happiest when they are fully loved by someone, yet they have few obligations to that person. Their detached nature involves numbness to what they really feel about something, often leading to terrible indecision.

A healthy child or adult may express all of the tendencies above to some extent, harmoniously wanting to belong, fight, or be alone at appropriate times. It is when these are no longer choices but *compulsions* that the person becomes neurotic. This is the tragedy of neurosis—that it takes away free will, making people act out their tendency no matter how different the situation.

Tendency to dependency

The intense work of repression, externalization of feelings (avoiding self-examination), and idealization of a certain self-image takes a huge amount of energy, so that the individual actually "loses sight of himself." With this loss, other people paradoxically become more important and more powerful in the person's estimation; their opinion gains a "terrible power." In short, the extreme egocentrism of the neurotic person ironically leads to a loss of self and dependence on others.

The competitive spirit of modern civilization, Horney wrote, was fertile ground for neuroses, because the emphasis on success and achievement gave people who had a weak self-image the opportunity to greatly compensate by becoming "eminent." She noted, "blind rebellion, blind craving to excel, and a blind need to keep away from others are all forms of dependence." Psychologically healthy people are not driven in any of these ways. Rather, their motivation is to express their talents more fully, making a solid contribution to an area of work that deeply interests them, or to love more deeply. They are inspired by the possibility of integration, not fired by desperation.

Final comments

Horney's idea of the "wholehearted" person who is fully in touch with their genuine or real self is not that different to Abraham Maslow's "self-actualized" individual or Carl Rogers' notion of "becoming a person." To sum

up her philosophy, Horney quotes psychologist John Macmurray: "What other significance can our existence have than to be ourselves fully and completely?" She believed that we are all powerful people. Our neurotic tendency is simply a mask we put on in order not to show our real self, but in nearly all cases it is no longer necessary. We can reclaim a compliant, aggressive, or detached self, giving up the compulsive behavior that we believed would protect us from imagined harm.

While she traced the origins of our inner conflicts to childhood, at the same time Horney made people accept the *present* dimensions of their neurotic tendency or complex, so that they could not hide behind an attitude of "this is how I am because of what happened to me." By confronting such truths she brought many readers to the *root cause* of their problems.

Our Inner Conflicts is well written, easy to understand, and contains many insights into human nature. Horney's optimism about the possibility of change is also quietly inspirational.

Karen Horney

Karen Danielson was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1885. Her father Berndt captained ships and was a strict Lutheran. Her parents divorced in 1904, and two years later the ambitious and intelligent Karen entered medical school at the University of Berlin. She soon married well-off PhD Oscar Horney, with whom she had three daughters.

From 1914 to 1918 she studied psychiatry and underwent psychoanalysis, including sessions with Karl Abraham. She began teaching at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, of which she was a founding member, and was involved in all the major psychoanalysis congresses and debates. In 1923 her husband's business failed and he became ill. In the same year her beloved older brother died of an infection, events that plunged her into depression.

In 1932, separated from her husband, Horney moved to the United States with her daughters, taking up a post at the Psychoanalytic Institute in Chicago. Two years later she settled in New York, working at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and enjoying the company of other European intellectuals, including psychologist Eric Fromm, with whom she had an affair. Her book New Ways in Psychoanalysis *(1939), which critiqued Freud, forced her resignation from the Institute, leading her to found her own American Institute for Psychoanalysis.*

Horney highlighted the social and cultural factors in psychology in her book The Neurotic Personality of Our Time *(1937). Other books included* Self-Analysis *(1942) and* Neurosis and Human Growth *(1950).*

Until her death in 1952, Horney continued to teach and work as a therapist. Feminine Psychology *(1967), a posthumous collection of essays, brought renewed interest in her work.*