

Notes on giving

In the experience of being together with other people, certain actions reflect a general attitude toward life. The way one person interacts with another can indicate a more profound, often unconscious and subtle approach to the world around them. From this, a few questions may arise: What is action? What is generosity? What is responsibility? What does an independent person look like? What are the characteristics of a true leader? Pondering these broader questions, this will be an investigation into mechanisms that lead people to act in ways that either place the responsibility to engage with reality with themselves or with another. In this way, it is an attempt to refine my own sense of action and to direct it away from dependence, passive-aggressiveness, and confusion.

In every moment that a person is awake and alive, there is a subtle yet profoundly meaningful choice to be made. There exist two options: to outsource or to integrate responsibility. Outsourcing of responsibility calls on other people to take action, and consequences, should any arise. A person who outsources appears to be responsible, yet, in actuality, completely relinquishes the need for decisive action. Because of this, they enter a limbo state, wherein they act and do not act at the same time. Only in the process of integration can true individual growth come about. In some cases, there is a delicate balance in the limbo I just mentioned. Outsourcing can indeed lead to action if it is followed by integration, as in learning, where the responsibility of the teacher is to expand awareness and knowledge of the environment; otherwise, it is an empty pursuit that is mostly used as a smokescreen in personal interactions to continue a general attitude of ineptitude, blindness, or to perpetuate a manufactured state of freedom from true responsibility.

A pervasive and clear example of outsourcing is trade. What one person does not have is acquired from one who does. In the case of modern society, what one person cannot produce is bought from another, who can. This example has the possibility of turning into a complex discussion of means and capital, but is used here only as a physical example of a mechanism that has subtler implications when investigated on a personal level. Nevertheless, there are degrees even in this context. The two extremes are equally unhealthy, leading to separation from others and an existence that runs contrary to what it ultimately means to be a human being.

There can be no perfect state of affairs in this physical world and only a sort of compromise. Within this compromise, however, a balance and refinement can be reached, which offers a rich, varied, educational, and fulfilling relationship with the reality that is presented to all of us. In the modern market, it is unreasonable to expect each person to produce every single item of food, clothing, and equipment that they will ever need. In this way, everyone hands over the responsibility of action to another, because there is an understanding that it is more efficient for there to be some degree of specialization. A farmer or artisan that concentrates their power and time can produce more abundantly within the limits of their own reality. This creates a shared responsibility, and multiple points of support create a stable, sustainable network.

Similarly, any plant will rely on millions of species of microorganisms to produce the nutrients that are necessary for its growth and survival while providing its shelter or byproducts for the benefit of other beings. In any case, there is activity on the part of the individual plant to "ingest" these materials, to transport them, and to incorporate them into the rest of its cells. Some plants go to the extreme and hijack the systems of a host in order to minimize their own efforts; these we call parasites. This classification comes from the disproportionate ratio between effort on the part of the plant to process its surroundings and the growth from which it results. Simply, if a parasite attaches to a tree, feeding off of the nutrients and water that are flowing in the vessels of the latter, it hijacks the effort of the tree as it seeks water, produces leaves, expands its canopy, and so on. The responsibility is placed on the host, with little to no exchange of material or protection that might benefit, in this case, the tree.

The two extremes of trade, whether natural or man-made, can be named hyper-specialization and hyper-independence. In the first, the greater part or even all of a productive process is outsourced in order to reach maximum output and therefore profit. In the second - which often appears as a reaction by individuals to hyper-specialization - extreme withdrawal from outside sources provides a sort of freedom from a vampiric environment. The cost of this, however, is the need to keep a sharp and sustained focus on all aspects of a project, lest the whole thing collapse from insufficient support. A minimum of dependence on outside sources is often extremely arduous to sustain because of the cost of putting so much responsibility on an individual. If one is to survive in some winter wilderness, for example, then the slackening of focus on weather patterns or the thickness of ice on a body of water has immediate and deadly consequences. Any other animal, separated from a group or

source of food, meets a similar end.

In a word, a certain amount of interdependence supports both the individual and the environment around it. Specialization combined with variety creates a stable net that can overcome circumstances that would quickly snuff out individuals that are left to their own devices.

How is parasitism different, then, from generosity? It appears to be the same mechanism: one being produces an abundance, part of which is transferred to another. In a sustainable transfer, however, the one that is producing does not operate on a deficit, putting more energy into a function than it keeps or obtains from outside. Parasitism is characterized by a disproportionate outsourcing of responsibility to other sources, often with little regard for limits to those resources. Generosity keeps the responsibility with the one that gives; in the example of a tree, it is generous with its shade, inasmuch as it is capable of producing leaves. The tree does not go into extremes of withholding or self-destruction, and a balance is maintained. In this way, by making responsible use of its resources and environment, the tree makes decisions and acts in a sustainable way.

How, then, does action, responsibility, generosity, outsourcing, and integration play out in a human social context? If growth can be described as a deeper interconnection with reality then, as in the rest of the natural world, a balance must be reached between dependence and individual integration. In the social context, learning a skill allows the person to act at a greater degree of independence; in other words, by integrating lessons, one becomes a sort of specialist that can offer their actions in order to support a group as well as themselves. It is only in acting, of course, that the benefits of such an integration can truly manifest themselves.

Going further, to a more personal level, it is possible to observe the particular degree of responsibility that a person offers to the environment around them. Taking into account the mechanisms mentioned above, the analysis of any given situation gains an enormous amount of clarity. The following examples will be an attempt to analyze common scenarios and investigate how a small part of the mindset can be changed to provide for deeper connection, personal integration, and additions to value in a communal and social system.

Any individual's degree of engagement with their environment is determined by how much they can observe and take into their awareness. This is a sort of basic

integration that can either lead to outsourcing of action or integration thereof. A busted bicycle tire can either inspire a call for help to someone who is deemed more capable of repairing it or a desire to go further into observation. The latter does not outsource action, since the nature of the desire is to integrate more information; namely, the source of the problem and what action must be taken in order for the tire to return to its most practical state of tire-ness. For a flat tire is still worthy of being called a tire; however, the beings and the rest of the context in which it finds itself benefit most from it being quite the opposite - that is, not flat. Of course, observing a flat tire is never enough for it to return to its ultimate state of being. Action must be taken, and often is. Let us return to the social aspect, however.

Action must follow the moment of observation. The nature of the action is determined by the degree of responsibility felt by the doer. Responsibility that is not taken ("Can someone please fix the flat tire?") necessarily results in outsourcing and is often called passivity; if taken, it can contribute to the process of integration ("Ah, I figured it out. You can ride the bike again if you want.") Creatures of habit often need to go through this cycle of observation and action many times before it can truly become integrated, but this is the nature of learning.

Responsibility that is deliberately outsourced with express knowledge and intention also has degrees of engagement; that is, such outsourcing can be instructive if it allows the opportunity for other people to integrate a scenario, or it can be destructive if it does not serve to benefit more than one person. Limiting an individual's responsibility is as destructive as demanding that they take more. In both cases, the balance of action is disturbed, though the nature of that disturbance is of two extreme kinds.

Using the Kaufman Drama Triangle, the proportions of responsibility, action, integration, and outsourcing can be clearly described. The persecutor role is very active indeed, but the destructive nature of it lies in the extreme outsourcing of responsibility with very little integration of a situation. Since it is someone else's fault, they must pay for it, and action will be taken to ensure that they do just that. The rescuer is active in a similar way, but differs in that responsibility is integrated to an extreme degree; curiously, the lack of outsourcing of responsibility separates the individual from their environment. Extreme engagement of the rescuer does not give space for others to act on their own or to expand their own perception. In this guise of engaging with reality, the rescuer is able to act without truly observing. The victim goes into extreme

outsourcing of action, hence creating and perpetuating the helpless nature of the role. There is an excessive integration of responsibility for the scenario as well as a non-responsibility for the action needed to change it; on the one hand, the victim role that acts in order to dampen the weight of this responsibility turns into the rescuer. On the other, it turns into the persecutor, who aims to do the same dampening by demanding action from others. The neurosis continues in the form of victim when, in an extraordinarily passive state, fault is accepted but responsibility to act is not assumed. Because these behaviors flow into and complement each other, this sort of non-engagement is allowed to continue.

The delicate balance of these four elements must be mediated by awareness. True engagement with a situation comes when observation is in alignment with reality. Since human beings exist in a world that places a limit on the capacities of any individual being, some of this observation must also be outsourced. The phenomenon of asking questions is not only a human experience, and can be extrapolated to the gentle swirling of a climbing plant as it, within its limits, seeks a path to expansion.

In a social environment, questions become the principle form of expanding awareness by finding a more direct source thereof. Simply, because we cannot understand and perceive everything, we can engage with the experience of another to gather information, learn, and draw conclusions. From other people, we obtain a sort of predigested experience of the world, just as we obtain predigested and integrated vitamins from animals, or sunlight from plants. The taste or quality of these predigested interactions depends on the experience of the digester; for example, it can be asked: if we outsource our sustenance to an animal that has lived in misery and filth, with its life cut off in a state of fear and brutality, what sort of sustenance is that, in the end? The same question can be applied to upbringing as well as the adult environment.

What sort of sustenance can truly be achieved in a world that promotes certain types of outsourcing, integration, and questioning? Here, I would like to explore not the far-reaching political implications of such a question, but rather the effect of these proportions** on the individual. The way a social being interacts with their world, again, is the way that they view that world. These mechanisms, perhaps, can be yet another small set of vocabulary that can encourage effective questioning of one's environment.

What is constructive questioning? Ultimately, questions are most closely linked with learning. A student, by definition, is one who goes to a master in order to learn more about their world by asking questions and integrating answers. This integration, of course, is critical for a constructive study. Otherwise, it becomes a pursuit that does not actually expand that student's ability to engage with their own reality. There can be another nature applied to questions: that of simple requests and clarification. In a way, this is the next stage of learning, where action has already been taken to engage with the world. Asking for clarification can create a pause in a person's action, since it brings them back down to the level of the student, who outsources their perception to someone else. When the answer is obtained, the active engagement can resume, perhaps in a more precise direction.

Curiosity, in its constructive form, leads to an expanded knowledge of the world. Crudely, curiosity invites the integration of new information, which can be used to engage with that world more effectively. Empty curiosity can be a social game, being used as a guise of engagement, when in reality, there is no true integration after the interaction. Only with true integration can an individual expand their connection with their environment.

An extreme version of this non-integration can be seen in a very simple question: "What can I do? What should I do?" These can be deeply philosophical investigations if and only if they are directed at the life of the individual. If they are directed at the outside world, at other people, then the individual outsources all aspects of their power; this peculiar question places the whole responsibility of perception, integration, and action on another. "Please tell me what the world is, what my relationship is to it, and how I should engage with it." As long as this question is being asked of everyone but the asker, there exists a deep lack of hope in one's own ability to integrate the answers for themselves. Because it is a guise of engagement, it is all too easy to continue asking questions in this manner.

To turn such a mechanism in a constructive direction requires what some would call "growing up", "becoming adult", or "taking your life into your own hands". This does not imply the extreme independence that was discussed before. Switching the habit of outsourcing to a habit of integration is paramount to turning a person's view from one of depression, anxiety, and frustration into one of hope and joy. Only when the responsibility is taken by the individual can they, as a truly connected being, engage with the world on the highest level of possibility. Again, the idea of levels must be

emphasized, since we exist in a limited personal universe. In this state, there are limits to our physical senses. However, within that limit is a range, and thus is it possible to constantly expand, to constantly integrate new scenarios, new possibilities, and different perspectives.

The result of this expansion is a dynamism that engages deeply with reality. It is action that does not outsource an excess of responsibility. It is not asking the question "What can I do?" It is not stating "Let me help" without actually observing and doing, as this is decoupled from integration. The deepest possible engagement must be doing what one can based on a true perception of the environment - helping, or whatever else might be necessary - and asking only with the intention of expanding both awareness and action. Invoking the natural world again, it seems that plants and animals will find and fill every corner of this world in which we find ourselves. In the most desolate, inhospitable environment, life exists in its multitudinous forms, each proclaiming in its quiet way: "Here we are, as we are!" The process of growth is almost taken for granted, since the idea of separating itself from its environment, to the extent that humans imagine they can, is not even remotely possible for any creature.

Thus, a true leader is one who acts, drawing others along with them. It is not a person who proclaims action or demands it of others. It is one who has integrated their responsibility and can offer their engaging action to the environment that surrounds them. A true leader also steps back, allowing others to integrate their own responsibility, thus expanding the interconnectedness of everyone in their environment.

So, I offer you this text. It comes from my limited perspective, yet it helps me see possibilities for deeper insights.

Onward then, eh?