

Life's Lessons & Abolitionist Politics

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How getting hurt as a child lead me to have a strong scepticism of unjustified authority

Pretty obvious outcome I guess, but it's not how it always goes.

Here's another outcome that can happen:

Something bad happens, and the person thinks; 'this sucks, my pain was totally undeserved, if I could just set an example for how to behave better and encourage everyone to emulate the aesthetics of doing better, then everything would be alright with the world.'

Here's the only way I knew how to accept what happened to me:

Something bad happened, my pain was the almost random result of people existing and then developing essences according to social conditioning, but I can find solace in collaborating with people grappling with similar environmental conditioning and where possible challenge any power that works through these social contracts.

Now, I'm not saying that because of the way the first person dealt with their pain they can't also become strongly sceptical of unjustified authority, I've just noticed a trend whereby it seems many of these people gravitate towards policing other people's behaviour according to simple and rigid rules, whereif you act in a way that looks outside the mould enough times you're treated as not being trustworthy.

The way I prefer to go through life is finding unique people precisely in order to scrape the bottom of the barrel of socially uncool mannerisms, to work out whether or not that socially uncool behaviour is something the status quo society was right to have deemed as something you should be ashamed of or not. So as to reason backwards whether the social norms we're enforcing are even good ones to begin with.

How you get convinced as a child that fucked up shit is actually ok is being taught that it's just part of the status quo social norm. And I understand people jumping to the simplest solution, and hedging all their bets on the probability that if someone had only enforced a better social norm and taught their abuser not to be abusive that it wouldn't have happened to them, and I can agree that it wouldn't have in that way, and those remedies are needed, but I can't stop there and open myself up to pain by imaging that we have all the answers for how to put checks and balances in place to make sure everyone is on a good path in life.

Anyway, as well as needing to live in doubt, and do this observation work to question every social norm, even the status quo good ones, I felt the call to adventure to simply rack up as many wild and complicated experiences as I could immediately, saying fuck it to the risks I chose, because at least I was out of the stifling social norms I'd been brought up to believe were healthy and had only hurt me. The steps that lead to someone becoming an abuser are so disgustingly simple and boring that they adequately suit the phrase 'the banality of evil', so at least by adventuring I was racking up complicated experiences which were the opposite of that.

Suffice to say as part of this bare bones existence I got to witness lots of people trying to play by the established rules, and falling behind or never even getting off the ground due to circumstances outside their control, which lead me to desire radical solutions.

Activism

My desire to live this bare bones existence left me with one intuitional bias about what type of activism I think is likely more productive, which people may or may not already find obvious and useful.

It has to do with a kind of harm reduction, welfare based politics where a group desires to be assimilated into the whole under certain conditions vs. an oppression abolition based politics where a group desires simple autonomy and positive liberties.

I have this scepticism of whether some of the protests done to achieve media attention for the civil rights struggle were well thought out or not, which is a semi-heretical claim to make today. But, I basically align with Malcolm X on this issue, who was the biggest voice given a microphone at the time questioning this.

The logic of the protests were simple, black civil rights activists would attempt to carry out every day civilized activities that white people got up to in their white only spaces where you know you're going to receive abuse and show up to the media the uncivilized nature of the attacker. Thus making a solid case against restrictions on integration, because the black community have upright social norms and are capable of shouldering their share of the burden of responsibilities in society.

Most famously you have the Montgomery bus boycott after the planned disobedience of Rosa Parks, a middle class, respectably dressed woman. Now an extra piece of trivia to this story that most, but not everyone who knows about the disobedience knows, is that inspiration for the planned disobedience was drawn from the arrest of a Claudette Colvin who wasn't well suited for the media attention as "she did not have 'good hair', she was not fair-skinned, she was a teenager, she got pregnant."

Anyway, this whole back story is to say; I respect more the spontaneous fight that teenager faced than the planned disobedience of Rosa Parks precisely because it was based on a spontaneous desire to confront injustice and do so regardless of any planned strategy. And although I think the way they went about the planned disobedience and boycott was likely a clever strategy, there were also many protests that were ill thought out and failed to get the required media attention. This meant people subjecting themselves to abuse for worse reasons than their own spontaneous choosing. So, I just don't think we should lose sight of the authentic bedrock inspiration for these struggles.

MLK said himself he was disappointed that engagement with the civil rights struggle dropped after the passage of the civil rights amendment, so I can't help wondering if

the civil rights movement of the time took a calculated risk not to put so much of their time and money behind the harm reduction politics of asking to be assimilated into respectable society, and instead into the basic means of survival in black communities, like labour and housing unions, then America might be a more equitable society today.

Finally, this calculus has implications for other struggles, like with the legal animal rights movement, whether we need to be cheerleaders for every KFC that offers a vegan option, or whether we should feel more energized about building up our own vegan cafes and forming contentious alliances of our own choosing, not only when it suits a multi-million dollar companies profit incentive.

So, my advice; live in doubt, try to stay open to holistic problem solving methods for remedying the foundational issues in society. Observe people's lack of autonomy living under various unjustified hierarchical relationships. Try to live a more frugal existence so as not to get lost in the rat race of consumer capitalism and find happiness in the small things like the fun you can have joking around with friends to get them to accept you for who you are or not to accept you at all, so as to create deeper connections which builds stronger communities:

"It can be annoying or hurtful when others presume they know everything about you. But rather than assert their wrongness and make them defensive, you can acknowledge it as a common human failing and find creative ways to hold a mirror up to what life experiences they've had that lead them to jump to those conclusions.

One way is a kind of playful authenticity, telling a lie about a lie, to get back closer to the truth. So don't outright challenge the idea, but don't live up to it either, in fact live down to it. Playfully undermine the idea by failing to live up to the glamour of what it would mean to be that person, then find a way of revealing that it was a misunderstanding all along, so they needn't worry about it applying to you."¹

"I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops."²

¹ A Love Letter To Failing Upward

² Stephen Jay Gould, The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History

The Ted K Archive

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