

Douglas Harding

How to be Spontaneous

The article under this heading, in the May '74 number of *Self and Society*, AHP activities made me look afresh into the question of my own spontaneity, and what (for me) spontaneity really is, with the results that I shall try to summarise here.

But first, the points in that article which started me off. Briefly, they were these:

When someone annoys me, there are four possible levels of response. (1) The worst, I say nothing. (2) Slightly better, I blurt out: "*You are a pain in the neck.*" (3) Better still, I say: '*You give me a pain in the neck.*' (4) The best, I report: 'When you did that, *I felt* a pain in the neck, etc.' Here, at level 4, there intervenes a tiny pause, when my attention is turned inwards to find out how I am actually feeling. This (as I understand the article) enables me to act spontaneously, with my whole self, on the whole situation.

I find there is a fifth possibility: I can notice that the pain I feel right here 'in my neck' isn't *for me* in a neck at all!

In that place where others observe my neck to be, I find nothing of the sort. When I'm really attentive I find here nothing solid, or opaque, or pink or brown or black, or cylindrical, but just space - space in which these pains and tensions are coming and going. In fact, I have difficulty in locating them anywhere at all - let alone inside a column of flesh and blood and bone, about 6" in diameter - to be quite honest.

Let me try to describe in more detail what I find happening at this fifth level:

(a) I notice that the situation *as given*, vis-a-vis that infuriating person, isn't in fact symmetrical at all. It's not a face-to-face or neck-to-neck confrontation, but neck-to-no-neck, face-there to no-face-here. I observe that, whether I like it or not, I'm wide open to and for him. Not on principle, not as a matter of policy, not in idea or feeling or imagination, but actually, in simple perception, I make way for him, I am room for him to be like that in. Right here, I find I'm built that way. Thomas Traherne puts it well:

No brims nor borders in myself I see: My essence is Capacity.

(b) Seeing this total asymmetry, I find thoughts ceasing. There occurs here a kind of 'alert idiocy'. My mind 'goes blank'. I'm perfectly clueless about how to cope.

(c) Commonly, though not invariably, I find, along with this cluelessness, a kind of relaxation, in which my body is very alive but very still, and my breathing seems almost to cease altogether.

(d) I just wait and see. Or rather, see and wait: see how it is here and await what comes out. I respond to that annoying person unpredictably, in accordance with no plan or conscious level of behaviour: I have no preview of what I shall find myself doing or saying. I may (and very often do) keep silent, or turn tail, or tear strips off him, or even (though this is most unusual) treat him to an account of what he's doing to my neck, etc., supposing I had one right here. Often I'm surprised, occasionally shocked, at what emerges.

(e) But whatever my reaction I find it can be trusted - *provided* I'm attending to where it comes from - this inner Emptiness or Clarity or Capacity. It turns out to be (so far as I can judge, with hindsight) the best response possible in the circumstances as a whole, appropriate to the total situation, and certainly never destructive or hating. (Conversely, to the extent that I imagine here a thing instead of no-thing, a solid face and neck to confront him with, I am rejecting him, shutting him out, telling him to keep off. My dishonest attempts to make the set-up symmetrical are a sort of hate - the very basis of all my personal-relationship problems - with the result that those problems get worse and worse).

(f) I may afterwards (but this is optional) attempt to explain to myself why this fifth level alone is, in my experience, truly spontaneous, creative, and workable. My explanation takes the following form:

This Space, or boundless Capacity, which I find here (in which that person is doing annoying things and these pains and tensions are going on) is what I really am as 1st person singular, present tense: it is my inside story. It has, traditionally, many names, from which I may take my pick. They include: the Void, the Buddha Nature, Tao, Atman-Brahman, Being, Consciousness, the One, Spirit, Essence, the Source, one's True and Original Face, the Single or Third Eye, the Kingdom within, the Light that lights every man, the Godhead, the eternal indwelling Christ - the names are many and varied, the fact is one and the same. I know it because I am it: it's the one 'thing' I have inside knowledge of. Whatever label I give it, I find it to be without any limitations or attributes, perfectly simple, indivisible, obvious, and accessible right here at this very moment.

It is me, but not mine. It belongs just as much to that annoying person as to me. It is the inside story of what we both really are. As this, at this level, I am him and he is me. I can, silently, but with total sincerity, say to him: '*Here*, I am you. To hurt you is to hurt myself.'

Of course it isn't necessary that *he* should see the situation that way, and I'm unlikely to burden him with an account of what I'm up to. And even if *both* of us are consciously enjoying this basic unity, it doesn't follow that we shall at once, or ever, cease to give each other a pain in the (no) neck from time to time. But our behaviour towards each other will at least be spontaneous, basically loving, and in the long run mutually helpful. For this seeing What or Who we really are isn't love in the ordinary sense. It goes deeper than that. It is love's basis. It is that conscious identity at the deepest level, which liberates us to enjoy our immense differences at every other level.

A final word about the practice of this fifth way. It sounds complicated: in fact, it is simplicity itself. But it isn't easy. The lifelong habit of taking everybody's word for what it's like right here, except the word of the one who is right here - myself - isn't quickly outgrown. Society's basic confidence trick (that I am here what I look like to you there, a solid thing, neck and all) isn't seen through once and for all. Only I am in a position to say how it is here, but the world has intimidated me, and it takes time to get back my courage to look for myself at myself, and then live by what I find.

It helps to have problems. If I'm having trouble relating to people, I have a powerful motive for seeing *Who* is having this trouble. For I find that all my problems - including that of spontaneity - boil down to the problem of my identity. Who am I? It is extremely easy to look and see for myself what the answer is: namely, that I am, at 1st person, just Capacity.* It is less easy to go on looking till the social confidence trick - which makes me out to be 3rd-person only - ceases to take me in. But neither is it as hard as it is often advertised to be.

*For instance, I have only to point here (to the place where I *imagined* that I experienced a neck) to see that my finger is pointing into empty space. Or I have only to look down at my trunk to see that it stops well short of my neck, and carries, Atlas-like, the world.

Jerome Liss

Learn Purposefulness in a Group

To Learn Feeling and Purpose Are Two Very Different Things

Up to this point we have focussed upon encounter groups that aid emotional growth through emotional discharge, self-disclosure and person-to-person relating. This has been the major direction of new therapy groups. However, there is another vital area of personal growth, *purposefulness for constructive action*, which relies on somewhat different group processes. Dr. Charles R. Kelley, Director of the Interscience Research Institute, Connecticut, conducts Interscience Workshops in Santa Monica, California, and offers a programme entitled

'Education in Feeling and Purpose'. Dr. Kelley describes the opposing functions needed to enhance feelingfulness and develop purposefulness: Feelingfulness emphasises spontaneous behaviour. Purposefulness emphasises controlled and sustained behaviour. Feelingfulness emphasises contacting others. Purposefulness emphasises functioning independently. Feelingfulness means to be guided by one's emotions; purposefulness means guidance by one's rational centre. Feelingfulness is linked to the 'capacity for tenderness'; purposefulness means the capacity for