

The introverts' revolution

In my eyes as a happy introvert, the unhappy situation I see is that society is dominated by extroverts, as perhaps one would expect. To me this is not just in the sense that the extrovert is always the centre of attention at social gatherings of various sorts, but above all in that society has taken on the values of the extrovert as the norm of what is healthy and happy. It seems to me that at every turn we can encounter the bullying extrovert who wants us to play along.

Yet to me this value system is flawed. The happiness of the extrovert will always depend on things out there. The happiness of the introvert does not. So, far from the assumption that the strength of society is relying on the bold extrovert; its real stability perhaps lies in the outer equanimity of someone who can find his or her happiness inside. The introvert tends to be good at looking inside. Meditation can be framed as the ultimate skill in this respect but what is its value of such introspection? Is it really a valid way to find out about ourselves? Isn't a therapist better, to get an objective view? So I hear the discussion going on, but is this really the point or is it just rather the mind-set of people who see inner life as a problem to be solved or as something that just gets in the way of our outer happiness? Is it merely the place we turn to if things out there are not working out? If we instead turn inside with a positive, active and creative mind we can potentially create an inner paradise for ourselves that we can sustain in the face of adversity. Perhaps this just requires that we value our inner life over the outer. Rather than looking for happiness on the outside we look to the inside. This is not selfish if we are happy without making demands on others. It can in fact free up our outer capacity to help others, rather than being concerned with ourselves and our outer happiness.

Secondly what use is the view of the introvert or the meditator for the world? "Surely they just get lost in their fantasies or something even darker in there?!" Yet someone who keeps one eye inside is not blind to the way their own thoughts or feelings are influencing their perceptions of the world. Unlike what is often assumed, the developed inner world is not a source of personal ideals that are then blindly or forcefully compared to reality in a fuzzy dissonance; this is actually more the reality of the extroverted mind that projects its desires very firmly out there. Also, the more aware we are of our own inner world, the more we notice that of others; and the more capacity we have for empathy.

Or perhaps the ideal is that we have a healthy mix – the bold extrovert to take the lead and the steady, careful introvert to follow. This, it seems, is how many animal cultures optimize their function. But isn't this optimization merely another outer value system? Maybe we would rather be better-off with cautious, frugal introverts taking the lead? Could this not indeed be the saviour of a humanity whose worldly greed threatens its own survival?

Even the life of the meditator seems to me to be coming under threat. The emphasis is shifting. So often the encouragement seems to be to just be aware of our inner life, "Feel the fear and do it anyway" – perhaps it's even better if we dissociate ourselves from it all, then we can function positively in the present moment no matter how we feel. Isn't this our modern consumer mindfulness? If we never react to our inner world we can look enlightened even if we have an enormous bunch of crap going on

inside. Is it not true in modern life that the most important thing is how we look rather than how we feel? Isn't this the ultimate tyranny of the extrovert? I think what we need is an introverts' revolution.

I offer this for your reflection.

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