

Everything Begins and Ends with You



Send him mail.



"Insight for the Young and Unrestrained" is an original weekly column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found here. IYU-only RSS feed available here.

Everything you ever do begins and ends with you. Every action you will take happens with the intention of bettering yourself, whether you tend to think of it that way or not. No matter how you slice it, everybody operates within a closed system of self-centeredness. The ripples of these actions taken toward bettering the self can extend outward to affect others in the process. Some people call this the ego. Others call it selfishness. Others still, even narcissism. Call it whatever you want, but it's an inescapable fact of reality, and of human nature.

No one can willingly partake in an action which he believes to be to his detriment, according to the subjective manner in which he momentarily evaluates all perceived options. If I intend harm upon myself, then by the very implication of intending it, it is no longer what I consider harmful in that moment. I may do many things which in hindsight I regret, although they gave me what I sought at the time. I may even be extremely conflicted at a moment of decision, going after what my emotional desires guide me toward, while understanding somewhere deep in my rational mind that this is not a good idea, and may come back to bite me in the long run. But the principle still stands. Everything I choose to do, I do so because I perceive it as aiding me in some way.

Of course, I'm wrong all the time. Things don't work out the way I intend them to, and I suffer as a result. In attempting to add to my own satisfaction, I fail to take into account all the pertinent variables along the way. The whole process might give me the exact opposite of what I was hoping for if I can't course correct in time. But the more knowledgeable I become about whatever complicated series of events I'm hoping to unfold, the closer the end product is to how I originally envisioned it. "Great" undertakings are only very successful when the people involved can predict with enough accuracy everything that will come to pass in transit from beginning to end. They must also be able to adapt enough to navigate through whatever new unpredictable circumstances arise and get back on course

to their chosen destination.

If you can't first come to understand, and even embrace, that what you do for yourself, it won't mean good things for your personal success. This happens to be the exact opposite message most schoolchildren are taught anywhere in the world. The primary message of our culture, and probably most others at any time in history, has been to put other people above yourself. Serve the needs of others before assessing your own. See everyone as equals. Oddly, the only notable exception to this might be airline safety regulations, which so incessantly remind us to "secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others". The reason for that should be obvious enough. You won't be much good to anyone else if you faint first.

Whenever you put someone else's needs as a priority over your own, you do a disservice to both of you. Doing what you don't actually perceive as the highest good for yourself, perhaps out of a sense of obligation or social pressure, almost guarantees a worsening of your circumstances in life. Service for others works wonderfully when their needs genuinely become a part of your own. When you help people because it legitimately makes you happy to do so, you are simultaneously bettering others as well as yourself. The sharing of pursuits toward happiness is a natural part of any healthy friendship, romance, business, or the raising of children. So long as every person involved is unashamedly doing the best they know how to do for themselves, and so long as that understanding overlaps and encompasses the intentions of everyone involved in any given course of action, principles of synergy automatically come into play. When executed correctly, it means everyone gains more and loses less than any could have if acting on their own.

But it all starts and ends with you. If you are at all hesitant about marching in the most direct path from where you are now to where you want to be, you'll always be limited in what you can achieve. How odd it should seem then that so much importance is placed on the principle of sacrifice for something greater than oneself. Patriotism is encouraged to the point of laying down one's freedoms, individuality, and very life for the preservation of a national identity. Various religions demand that your life and body are not your own, but the property of some entity or institution more powerful than you could ever hope to be. All of this means incurring losses of whatever else you would choose to do under optimal circumstances.

The doctrine of self-sacrifice persists because replacing other people's natural intentions with your own goals is ultimately the only sustainable way to control people. A man, once chained and shackled, knows his life is under the control of a tyrant diverting him from his chosen path. George Orwell warned us of this when he showed us that Big Brother's ultimate aim was never merely physical compliance from the masses. It was a complete and total takeover of every individual's emotional capacity to determine their own values. It was to replace the natural ego, the "self" that exists in every person at birth, with the

group identity called Big Brother. The same disturbing trend exists on all scales, from the lowly family unit all the way up to the largest social organizations dominating the planet today.

Ask yourself how much of your own life is really lived for you, and not for something outside of yourself... something which somehow crept its way into your sense of identity. The answer might depress you. But the first step to solving a problem is the awareness that there is even anything wrong at all. The fewer the number of imposters you allow to take up space in your mind, the more the original sense of who you are will start to return to occupy the space you've cleared for it. And it's only when you feel confident in who you are and what you want, that you can take pride in your self-serving actions. It's the only way to get on the path to becoming an optimally-functioning human being.