

Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

The idea of agency may be a new concept to many people, in spite of the existence, activity, and response to various forms of agency which exist throughout the societal systems of humanity.

Becoming conscious of agency, however, is only an initial step toward the maturity of awareness and understanding by which each of us can become participants in the daily functioning, the future planning, and the ongoing response of agency, to the circumstances and needs which humanity individually and collectively experiences.

Such participation requires that we develop perception and vocabulary of the nature, actions, potential, limits, and needs which various forms of agency include; that we develop the ability to accurately and honestly discern whether or not particular forms of agency are effective; and that we understand clearly the values by which this effectiveness is measured.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Governmental Agency

This is the task of coordinating the activity, satisfaction of needs, and general development of millions of citizens. The population has grown too large for effective management at a local level. Previously, a group gathered or made whatever was needed, using whatever was available. Now, large numbers are dependent upon others whom they do not know. These are likewise dependent upon still others. In order for everyone to survive, all must have legitimate and effective ways of meeting needs. Governmental agency has the ability to negate the effects of separateness and to facilitate interdependent survival by integrating contributions. Because of such large numbers, however, nurturing of individuality is rare, regardless of its positive potential.

Therefore, governmental agency must be empowered to deal with such broad exchanges, without being expected or requested to respond to local ideosyncracies and personalities far too small

for its perspective to even see. The separation of church and state, for example, recognizes that local churches generally have more expertise in nurturing spiritual development, because of the ability to perceive and respond to the uniqueness of local communities and individuals. Similarly, governments generally have more expertise in managing economic and societal relationships.

Unfortunately none of this guarantees effective action is actually happening. Some churches, for example, desire the capabilities of governmental agency, without respecting the limitations which are equally inherent. Some governments, conversely, desire to micro-manage the lives of their citizenry, in spite of any inability to be effective at diverse and individually unique local levels. There is also the question of whether a particular government or church is in fact doing its respective job well.

During my years at Saint Victor's Elementary school, "Parent-Teacher Conferences" during which parents would speak with teachers to learn of children's progress, were always awkward, due to meeting within classrooms with child-sized furnishings. The chairs which were just right for me, had my parents sitting with their knees folded nearly up to their chins. They were now the outsiders, unable to fit into the circumstances in which I lived five days each week. Parents and teachers provided the structure within which elementary education occurred; the needs, characteristics, and aptitudes of students determined the scale, components, and approach by which this education was performed. Neither could replace the other and neither would be able to accomplish what was necessary without the other.

The goal of these conferences was the creation of a positive, effective, symbiotic relationship--much like most of the other relationships which fill our lives.

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Communal Agency

The task of coordinating the activity, satisfaction of needs, and general development of a much smaller group of citizens, perhaps even a family (as was the case with governmental agency), has certain abilities and limitations.

Because we are headed for either global community or conflict of unimaginable proportions, one of the current tasks of communal agency is to prepare us for cross-cultural relations.

Growing up within a small farming town, I recall that world news was rarely published within our local newspaper and that discussion of people in other cultures was superficial at best. In a very real sense, the world as I understood it was no bigger than the roads along which I rode my bicycle and the assortment of people with whom I interacted each day. Similarly, while a student at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City, I sometimes met people who had never traveled beyond their own neighborhood.

Because information and understanding about unfamiliar things was lacking, most people I met in either place were both afraid of going anywhere and also unable to relate to visitors from other places. For whatever reason, I have always found differences fascinating, not frightening. Perhaps this is because early in life, on some level, I knew who I was (and still am).

It is difficult to discuss agency without integrating some awareness of identity. Thus far, this newsletter has discussed agency as action on behalf of basically healthy individuals. The contrast to this are those individuals who have placed their identities within their governments or communities instead of within themselves. When asked, "Who are you?" They respond, "I am an American," or "I am from New York City."

Agency is a dynamic of relationships which is rarely (if ever) effective at providing empowering identity. Ideally, healthy communities are healthy because they are composed of healthy individuals. Working together, healthy individuals can create a healthy community. Joining a healthy community does not necessarily make one a healthy person, however, because a community only deals with interpersonal relationships and does not deal with internal or spiritual relationships.

Communal agency is the task of valuing and integrating each individual's person and contribution, toward the creation of a harmonious and integrated group which manages certain local

activities and generally has minimal effect on people living in other places.

Because life is ongoing and forever growing and changing, it is vital to understand that all forms of agency are continuous struggles with a range of issues and challenges which are forever being redefined and restructured to deal with new circumstances and information. As new information becomes available, old policies need to be rewritten. As new individuals present themselves to specific communities, new possibilities appear also. Wonderful things can now happen which were previously impossible.

Ideally, communal agency synchronizes and organizes--rather than censors or restricts--the possibilities its current roster of citizens offers. Too often, however, there is a weariness of the ongoing struggle rather than a delight in the expansion of possibilities and the communal agency is crippled by its rejection of a particular member's unique enthusiasm.

Because of its ability to coordinate various needs and abilities within a certain group, however, communal agency also has the ability to open doors for specific individuals in ways that benefit both the community as a whole and every other individual's unique contribution as well. Numerous persons have discovered the better parts of themselves, specifically because of something observed within another. In this way, the sharing of creative contributions, facilitated by communal agency, can produce exponentially empowered growth which benefits everyone.

For example, Tom creates a wheel which Mary uses to build a cart and Lesley fashions into a clock gear. Harry expands Mary's cart into a self-driven vehicle, Jean builds a clock-tower in the town square, Daniel creates a wrist-watch, Jeremy makes a hay wagon, and Laura widens the wheel into both a rolling pin and a baking pan, which she uses to make delicious pies--and on and on it goes, all from Tom's wheel, all because they're willing to value each others' contributions and to also try something new, thereby expanding the possibilities much further than Tom ever imagined. Communal agency's role in all of this was to provide the necessary materials, place, and opportunities for each of these accomplishments to happen. Communal agency can do all of this and more, but it will not do what individuals must first do for themselves.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Self Agency

From the time of my earliest memories, various people have tried to tell me who I am. Since none of them knew my inner thoughts and feelings, however, none of them had complete information. Considering how active my mind has been since the time I was three or four, I find it incredible that anyone would presume to define something as important as my identity on the basis of only what was externally visible. What makes such efforts to define me from the outside inward all the more preposterous, is the basic fact that none of them had to live with the consequences of accepting or believing anything they said. I, on the other hand, am inherently unable to escape everything that is genuinely myself.

Living in a house full of heterosexual people for over twenty years, for example, was not enough to convert my inherent homosexual orientation to a heterosexual one. Likewise, no amount of love for persons in my biological family would make it possible for me to change my orientation in order to please them and fulfill their dreams and hopes of what I would someday be. Ultimately, I found that I could not be anything I wanted to be; I had to be myself.

In beginning to understand self agency, I accepted that through an embrace of honesty and genuine love, I am daily challenged to find the best within myself which I can give to the world around me and to give it regardless of whether or not it is well-received. I recall a poster with the words, "If it is to be, it's up to me." As an encouragement toward being proactive, I find it recommendable. As a statement of ultimate truth, I find it incomplete. Why? Because of the struggle to

*"The expression of love and faith
guarantees no particular results,
but nevertheless sows seeds
of miraculous possibilities
which are beyond the reach of reason."*

--Sister Who

define what "it" is. If I am talking about my response to all that life throws at me, yes, it is up to me. If I am talking about the collective reality of the world in which I live, it is up to we. If I am talking about ultimate possibilities and things which transcend all human control and effort, it is up to Thee (God, whom I continue to insist still has the final word on everything, although there are many times when I cannot begin to fathom God's reasons for allowing life to unfold as it does).

Self agency, therefore, is not a question of creating my own reality but rather of creating my own experience of whatever reality I encounter and of also embracing whatever life has to offer and giving to it the greatest excellence and effort I have to offer. Self agency is committing myself to integrity and welcoming its consequences. Self agency is finding not necessarily courage, but rather conviction that I cannot be or do or say anything to which I am not willing to sign my name.

In chapter 32 of the biblical book of Genesis, Jacob wrestled all night by a riverbank and was given a new name. Similarly, there are many times throughout our lives when we are challenged to wrestle with an issue which has no clear answer, name, or conclusion. That a victory occurs at all is sometimes to be found only within the fact that we never give up. Regardless of outcome, I must be willing to wrestle; to fully, consciously, persistently wrestle with persons and things beyond myself.

Self agency wrestles with as many challenges as awareness will allow. Always there are yet more challenges which could be pondered, addressed, and engaged. The measure of the wrestling is not so much determined by the identity of the winner as by the strength, honesty, and integrity of the struggle. Nonetheless, if I run away from the struggle, I run away from my true name as well. As was true for Jacob, my true name is revealed within the relationships I build with the communities and the world around me, specifically by engaging in the struggle.

I was told years ago that the cavalry is not coming to rescue me, as in old Hollywood cowboy movies. I have not always found this to be true, but neither have I always found it to be false; I found that I needed to do all that I could, the very best that I could do it, or I would be a burden rather than a blessing to whatever community I encountered along the way, as well as to myself.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Spiritual Agency

Perhaps the greatest evidence that God is alive is that my relationship with Him is as unpredictable as at least half of the relationships I've had with various people over the years. Countless times I have done my best, braced for the worst, and stood by in amazement as the outcome defied all probability and statistics.

Important to all agency, it must be remembered, is collaboration. There is something I need to do, but it is not enough to determine the outcome. There is something God may do, but it too is not enough. Likewise, there is something for communities and nations to do, but these also are not enough. What determines the outcome is the combination of all of the above.

With that in mind, I am planning to travel to the Santa Barbara area of California later this month, to be interviewed for an MA/PhD in Mythological Studies academic program. My hope is that this degree would open doors for me within the world of writing and publishing, but how to finance this program is still a mystery. Also, the housing accommodations for this brief trip have suddenly become unavailable, so I'm not sure where I will be staying. Obviously something is going to happen, but I couldn't begin to tell you what it will be. For now, it's an uncharted adventure, but in the words of Hellen Keller, "Life is an adventure or nothing at all." That being said, let's see where it goes.

If I am accepted to the program, the next step will be a five-hundred-dollar deposit to confirm my interest. Thereafter, more traditional forms of financial aid may become adequately available. Regardless, miraculous developments in the past suggest that there will be yet more miracles to come within the future, often within the least hospitable of circumstances and sometimes through people as ordinary as you and me.

A few years ago it seemed God wanted me to be a student at Iliff School of Theology. My experiences turned so sour that I wasn't sure I would survive, but here I am just over two years later with a completed masters degree. Perhaps this will be another miracle of spiritual agency also, expressed through the hands, wisdom, and love of countless extraordinary individuals. I just don't want to wonder what might have been if I had only been willing to try. Well, I am willing so here goes.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

On a Personal Note

On a somber note, my betta fish, Solomon, died a few weeks ago. Somehow there was always something wondrous and challenging about his inclusion in my little family. He lived within a completely different world than I, but one which it was my responsibility to maintain. Nearly every morning, he would respond to the addition of five granules of fish food with enthusiastic chomping which seemed to dismiss any illusion of complete disconnection or isolation. Once a month, for a brief second while transferring him back to his usual fish tank, we would touch--a little flopping of life within my gently curved fingers. I do miss him and I'm thankful for the years he was with me here, a vibrant blend of red, blue, and lavender, dancing through the pillars of his purple castle within his watery little world.

On an especially positive note, the last week or so has been spent helping Michael unpack, organize, and get settled. After nine years alone, it is somehow amazing to share my home with someone again and find roles so differently defined than the nine years which I previously shared with Neil (with whom I am still very good friends). There is a curious confidence and peace to the love blossoming of our love; he is also searching for new employment by which to help keep our household afloat financially and would appreciate your prayers.

On a similar note, someone commented after seeing the website that I must be doing well financially. "No," I said, "it's simply an indication of how hard and how far I can stretch a twenty-dollar bill." Hopefully many more people will soon discover the prayerful power of songs included within my new album. Many people are also once again faithfully watching "Sister Who Presents" on local cable-access TV. Ultimately it is not how perfect I perform, but how God chooses to intervene within the hearts, minds, and lives of viewers.

May God's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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