

~~fact we begin to describe them as actions and not movements.~~

Teaching offers a useful example, and one which works symmetrically for its complement, learning. Teaching is an activity, the central activity of many persons' lives. But we come to realize before long that it is not the sort of thing we can *do*! That is, we translate the activity of teaching into motions we habitually make, and which we think have some connection with students' learning. Yet the frustration with this state of affairs manifests itself in multiple ways, the most common being to slip into a straightforward causal model for teaching and to proceed to bully. All this happens even when we know how inappropriate and demeaning is the image of a teacher pouring something into a student's head. The frustration should tell us something about this activity and the way it relates to the motions we might make.

Aquinas translated this state of affairs admirably. Using 'cause' in the analogous way in which medievals were wont, he observed that a teacher can at best be no more than an inadequate secondary cause of anyone's learning anything. Secondary because that person's own power of understanding would be primary; and inadequate, I take it, because one never quite knows which motions will help and which hinder the process.⁹

I have distinguished between motions and actions, but the term 'action' is analogous enough to cover both. By distinguishing between them, I intend to call attention to different classes of descriptions: reserving 'action' for the more far-reaching (which include the results in the description), while limiting 'motion' or 'movement' to those (descriptions of) actions whose results are co-terminal (or nearly so) with performing them. The activity of murdering someone requires certain motions, one of which might be pulling a trigger. The latter too is an action, of course. The point of discriminating among descriptions in this way is to remind us that paradigm instances of actions tend to involve the intent in such a way that Wittgenstein's dicta and the doctrine of the *Gita* and *Ramayana* sound less paradoxical and more commonsensical.

To think that we have ever achieved or accomplished something like teaching another how to reason properly appears as the grossest illusion. No more argument is needed. We get the point. Perhaps we ordinarily miss this point because we really act so rarely. What we call actions are usually set responses called for by our social roles, and so more properly termed reactions. It is only when we try to step out of the routine reserved for us that we sense ourselves launched on a path of action. And this path frightens us precisely because we cannot tell where it will lead. When we step out of a predictable pattern, the *fact* that we cannot secure the results of our actions (or intentions) is driven home to us. Conversely, so long as we remain within that pattern, where movement and results appear linked in a predictable way, we sense that we are not acting so much as functioning within a system. (Think of a department chairman signing a

requisition: he is not *doing* anything; he is simply making a movement. The system does the rest.) Establishments assure that things get done. But were the persons involved to think themselves to be acting in a full-blooded sense, they would be deceived in that pervasive way that creates illusion.

Observations like these about systems give rise to anti-establishment sentiments and radical critiques precisely because we sense such a collective illusion to be entropic. And of course it is, and so offers an apt illustration of the Judaeo-Christian symbol of original sin: a state of self-deception projected and hence objectified, originating in and sustained by avoidance routines designed to forfeit my responsibility for what otherwise might be my actions.

But what alternatives remain? What does authentic action look like? If it cannot achieve anything, why engage in it? How can we know what to do, if we have nothing but the negative guidance: renounce the fruits of your actions? Is it simply that in renouncing them, in releasing oneself from the illusion created by thinking that we could accomplish what we set out to do, that we can then truly act? Something like this is at stake for Wittgenstein, I feel, close as it is to his convictions about philosophic activity as therapeutic or maieutic: released from a deceptive or misleading picture, one simply will understand. The activity of renouncing, however, is no easier to articulate or to carry out than is the skill of philosophical therapy. Yet like all other activities whose very description defies our accomplishing them, certain movements appear to be more or less conducive to releasing one from the illusions of acting. These could free a person to do what he or she can do, and hence to act truly.

Such movements are embodied in traditional spiritual disciplines, and gestured at by terms like 'prayer' and 'meditation,' terms which carry a great deal of promise. Yet these very terms also entail certain practices and movements. From the Christian scriptures, the Gospel of Mark offers an illustrative narration. After having been sent on a tour of the villages with 'authority over unclean spirits,' the apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, "You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while" (6:8, 30). They do so, but are followed by a multitude. Out there in that lonely place, the apostles manage to feed that multitude by distributing what they had with them. The headiness that ensued from their turn at working wonders demanded some time apart to put things in perspective, to remind themselves by what power they had in fact accomplished those things. The object lesson was of a humbler sort though in the very same vein: they managed to feed everyone by doing what was in them to do. Mark's version of the Kingdom and its power exploits the gap between action and result to find space for the power of God. In similar fashion, Matthew will show how the Kingdom puts us in touch with a new power and releases us to act, by contrasting it with the inertial religious establishment.

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Coming away to a lonely place represents a movement conducive to renouncing any credit we might be tempted to take for whatever we may have accomplished, whenever the things we did happened to accomplish something. Taking credit for accomplishing those things is natural enough, for it appears that we did *do* them. It becomes a temptation, however, precisely because any connection between the movement we carried out and the results which ensued remains fortuitous. And we know it. The temptation, more precisely, consists in taking credit not for the movements we may in fact have made, but for the action which we are prone to describe in terms far more inclusive than the mere movements. That is what we set out to do by making the movements we made; so what the *Gita* calls 'fruits' fall quite naturally within the scope of our actions as we intend them. Hence a deliberate effort must be made to 'renounce the fruits of our actions.'

What would it be like, then, to act without illusion? To act truly? One is reminded of Socrates' announcement in his *Apology*: 'The truth of the matter is this, gentlemen,. Where a man has once taken up his stand, either because it seems best to him, or in obedience to orders, there I believe he is bound to remain.' (29a). Whatever his grounds, he must undertake what he sees to be right: that is, he must perform those actions which he assesses to be conducive to the state of affairs which he deems it his duty to promote. That some calculation may be required in the manner in which one acts is the well-coded message of the *Crito*. But beyond that, a man can only do what is in him to do: he can only make the movements which he judges to be conducive to the intended results. Whatever more eventuates is beyond him; he can neither take credit for it nor assume blame for its failure.

Prudence is a necessary step, but the justification (and hence the proper cause) lies elsewhere for the movements undertaken in the name of action of a certain sort. Gandhi called it 'truth-force' and the New Testament speaks of the Spirit and the power of God. Both insist that right action is action emanating from that dimension of power. The respective traditions stemming from Gandhi and Jesus offer movements designed to put one in touch with those levels of oneself where contact with such power can be obtained.

Such language is indirect to the point of oddness, yet the nature of those very disciplines wards off any hint of magic formulae. For we cannot purchase assurance of success even at the level of contact with the Spirit or with truth-force. In fact, that very 'contact' seems to be so linked with the renouncement we have spoken of as to make success redundant. Even more, what counts as success is transformed by our being led beyond the initial framework in which we were prone to describe our undertaking. Thus anyone who acts from that spiritual power will achieve something. In more classical terms familiar to us from Plato and Aristotle, the just

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man acts without hope of reward, since virtue carries its own. But such thoughts become mere sentiments when the keystone virtue, prudence, diminishes to a form of calculation, or if this entire process is supported by a naive theory of action producing results. So the parallels from other traditions recall what must have been tacit presuppositions for Aristotle.

David Burrell
