
What's at stake?

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Darrell Calkins, to be published and available on the website next month.

“When I listen to you, sometimes you feel like one unending string of contradictions. You seem to go to great lengths to support many things which you then turn around and trash. Spirituality/religion would be one primary example, but hardly the only one. Can you comment more on the role of the whole paradox thing in your work? Why is it so important? Why can't you present anything in a linear way?”

The primary reason that I'm not a representative of specific groups or schools of thought is that that choice gives me the freedom to look at these groups and thoughts from the inside and the outside. I'm trying to be honest in that role—what really works here and what does not? That is, I have nothing to sell or win by any given position. I'm promoting a similar process for any person I interact with in my work, including toward me.

Investment in a given idea or group tends to immediately shut down options for perception, and then choice. Prejudice, bigotry and arrogance breed from that. One is forced to think a certain way to stay within the group or thought, and then to defend against apparent opposition. This constructs and feeds the kinds of adamant separation and conflict we see so many manifestations of on every level. In many cases, it's also the cause of deep internal conflict in most individuals, yet it isn't really addressed.

I try to focus on the essence of things. Following an already understood idea to its assumed conclusion is what linear thinking usually produces. One ends up with what one already has and knows... It's raining outside; stay in. I'm hungry; go eat. I feel unsatisfied; make more money. An initial perception or impulse has an infinite number of directions it can go. Some work better than others. But in any case, if one doesn't take time and energy to focus on the essential impulse, the gesture that follows will replicate what one already knows.

On paradox, it's not intentional. There are some things that don't function as one would assume. For example, the impulse and linear thinking associated with the search for happiness most often produce questions like, "What's in it for me?" or "How do I get what I want?" Paradoxically, if you will, that very question pushes authentic happiness away. Now, to try to explain that to someone in such a way that they hear and are interested by the idea is going to probably involve some paradox and non-linearity.

“So many traditions advocate the notion that freedom comes from surrender; surrender to a specific deity/deities, and surrender to a preconceived set of beliefs and spiritual/social rules. Obviously, you’re headed in a different, more complex, and ultimately more dangerous direction: freedom is an individual’s greatest gift and greatest burden (regardless of organizational affiliation), and as such entails enormous responsibility. Can you talk more about the role of freedom and responsibility in our evolution? Not only in terms of defining concepts, but also in terms of how they influence our lives? To whom are we ultimately responsible? What is it we are trying to preserve and promote? What exactly is at stake in this arena?”

Well, for one, freedom and responsibility themselves are at stake. One does not find freedom or enact responsibility by surrendering to another's conceptualization of these ideas. Living out the rules of conscience laid down by someone else for the attainment of an unquestioned goal, a freedom designed and articulated by someone else, is the surrender of human imagination and intuition.

In the more extreme versions of this, we end up with a collective momentum resulting in events such as Nazi extermination of millions of Jews, the Inquisition, or similar events recently in Africa and elsewhere. That comes from allocating one's conscience to someone else, not attending to one's own deeper intuitive sense of right and wrong.

On a more personal and, I think, devastating level, we lose access to our imaginative spirit—the impulse to imagine and create from our soul's yearning. That may sound esoteric, but in practical translation, we end up with a life we never really imagined and designed. The goal, the methods to it, and the responsibilities attached to it were never questioned. Just play out the part someone else wrote for you, following the indications on the prefabricated signs along the road. I call this the superimposed self. You don't really know or even recall what it was you truly wanted to do or be. "Life" got in the way of living; you did what you were told to do. Somehow, there was never time or space to really explore, to learn to love or create, or to ask, "Now, what am I here for, again?"

Each religion has provided a tremendous service in defining elements of conscience. They have made it possible for us to live together in a society, to work toward common goals, and to learn how to accept or tolerate relative opposition to our own opinions. I also think that this has been done much as a parent needs to provide a similar service for an adolescent. Internal and external conflict requires discipline to organize and structure some form of minimizing the chaos imposed on others.

There is a pivot point, however, to become an adult. That transition comes from recognizing and acting in accordance with your own deepest impulses. On the responsibility front, that means acting in harmony with your conscience, not because you're going to be punished if you don't, or paid for it if you do (heaven, enlightenment, salvation, or whatever), but because you know it to be right. On the freedom front, that means acquiescing to your deepest inspirations, following what truly compels you, even when it's difficult to do so. These two principles brought together in the same time and space is what integrity is all about. And it is only through such

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integrity that you resolve conflict between the two of them: what you "know to do" and what you "want to do."

Let's see; what else is at stake? How about the human race? Whether or not one believes in the accelerating dangers of the climate crisis, the end of fossil fuels, or the permanent annihilation of species of plants, insects and animals that essentially cover our ass by maintaining an inconceivably complex environment in which we have the freedom and responsibility to do pretty much whatever we'd like, it's not too difficult to at least perceive the dangers of heightened tensions between cultures which now, for the first time, have the power to annihilate each other or the entire planet.

I recently saw a wonderful documentary about what the Earth would look like many thousands of years from now. A number of experts from different fields and disciplines offered their views. Not one of them even mentioned human beings remaining on the planet. The species that would survive all had certain incontestable dynamics already in place. One primary quality, if you will, was that they had all resolved severe conflict within their own species. That is, all their energy and focus was directed toward real enemies, challenges and problems, not imagined or invented ones. They already realized that they were on the same team. The dynamic for the human race is exactly that of an adolescent frantically struggling to find a way to resolve apparently opposed impulses within himself.

Now, if you throw into an analysis of this problem the fact that internal species conflict for human beings is promoted and fueled by the different spiritual organizations or religions which are supposed to teach us how to resolve conflict, where exactly are we to find methods for resolving it? That's going to take imagination and integrity well beyond anything we've yet seen. It's also going to require a clear recognition that the challenge is not an abstract game, that we are not guaranteed immortality, and that ultimately, it's our freedom and responsibility to determine what happens. And there is a clock ticking away somewhere.

Darrell Calkins

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Comments

Thank you for your comments about the previous issue of CobaltSaffron. Excerpts from a few we received:

“It’s fabulous to be able to complete, with each letter, the puzzle of this marvellous alchemy that you teach us. What a wonderful support in our daily life, as a thread which keeps us all connected, which keeps us in contact. Keep it up! Keep it up! Thank you!”

V.V., *Belgium*.

“Almost a month that the last newsletter arrived to us... This letter, more than the others, has entered into me and won’t leave me... The question asked regarding Inspiration and its association with the word Interface have rubbed each other so strongly that they gave birth to a spark... And this spark, for a month, has become a burning fire fed by a new and luminous curiosity. New curiosity because it appears obvious that the “Old level of knowledge” was not large enough to enter into such a big subject, I needed to call for a new dimension of comprehension, something unknown and not yet created... Darrell, all the questions [that I ask myself] are, alone, transcendent through the movements they give birth to... Thank you for this luminous newsletter...”

I.B., *Belgium*.

Upcoming event:

RETREAT TO THE SOURCE

23 - 30 April 2006, Gascony - France

CobaltSaffron

A FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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We welcome questions, comments and complaints.

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