

**Consciousness: Working for Social Change:**  
*Virtues to Avoid and Temptations to Seek*

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Too often people honestly working for social change and the improvement of human life become so involved with the struggles that their work entails that either they become frustrated and burn out, or, if they succeed, they have become so angry and power oriented that they are no better, and sometimes worse, than those whom they replace. The major problem seems to be one of ego involvement, the identification of self with the work so that one's perspective becomes narrowed in one of two ways. In the first instance one's view is reduced to the immediate concrete to the point where success becomes everything; the end being reduced to the means, with power the fundamental concern. The archetype of these pathologies are the perverted revolutions in which the champions of the people in the fight for freedom and justice become the worst oppressors of all (Stalin, for example). But the difficulty of personal consciousness becoming narrowed under pressure of work so that the instrumental goals replace the ultimate ends is a continuing danger in the mundane, day-to-day activity in every field of work from the librarian who thinks, "if

only people wouldn't use the books we could keep them in order," and the foreman who says, "never mind if you can't tighten all the bolts so long as the order gets out on time," to the legislator who agrees to his bill being amended to the point of meaninglessness just to get it passed, and the politician who sells out his program in order to receive campaign donations to help him/her be reelected.

The second type of reductionism involves narrowing one's perspective to one's concept of the ideal to the point that it becomes an obsession. This may simply lead to incompetence where an actor becomes blind to concrete everyday concerns, or it may lead to factionalism, such as splintered the left in the United States, as people become so uncompromising that they spend more energy in fighting over abstract ideological issues than they do working for their cause. Reduction of perspective to the ideal also creates frustration to the extent that it involves raising expectations beyond the point of achievement. This may result in people giving up and dropping out, even when they are making important gains, as happened in the case of many 1960's activists, or the resulting anger may produce desperate or suddenly violent actions which may be counter-productive. In the worst case over concentration upon the ideal

leads to a single-minded ruthlessness in which all other values are sacrificed in the search for an abstract concept of perfection as exemplified by Robespierre in the French Revolution.

The problem of consciousness in social action, as in most of life, is a difficult and often delicate one of attaining balance in order to maintain perspective. Since concrete situations are constantly changing, the problem of balance is the dynamic one of maintaining continuity in change. The principles that need to be balanced continually are innumerable. Amongst them are the following:

- |              |   |                 |
|--------------|---|-----------------|
| Means        | - | Ends            |
| Short Run    | - | Long Run        |
| Power        | - | Authority       |
| Action       | - | Vision          |
| Will         | - | Reason          |
| Independence | - | Interdependence |
| Creativity   | - | Discipline      |
| Intimacy     | - | Autonomy        |
| Personalism  | - | Impersonalism   |
| Justice      | - | Compassion      |
| Self         | - | Other           |
| Stability    | - | Change          |
| Simplicity   | - | Complexity      |

Segmentation	-	Integration
Competition	-	Cooperation
Meaning	-	Form
Expectation	-	Acceptance
Expectation	-	Achievement
Formulation	-	Application
Theory	-	Practice
Inner	-	Outer
Fear	-	Love
Fear	-	Faith
Involvement	-	Detachment
Male	-	Female
Righteous	-	Effect
Balance	-	Concentration of Energy
Breath of Vision	-	Focus

In order to achieve and perpetuate balance and perspective the actor needs to attain a sufficient distance from events and activity to see things clearly as they are (without becoming so detached as to be unconcerned or incapable of action). To do this requires transcending one's ego, defining oneself as something more than what one accomplishes. There are many means for developing distance, balance, and perspective.