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Radical Decency Reflection #7
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Gathering in the Good Guys: A Vision of What Can Be

In my last Reflection, I described how the values of the predominant culture divide the good guys – the many people who share a passion for creating better lives and a better world -- fragmenting their energy and marginalizing their impact. In this Reflection, I discuss three ways in which Radical Decency supports more integrated, and a potentially more effective, approaches to change.

Radical Decency is a values-based call to action. It invites us to organize our lives around a set of values that are practical, understandable, and all encompassing:

Be decent in all that you do – to yourself, to others
and to the world – and to do it at all time, in every
context, and without exception.

We practice Radical Decency trusting that it will guide us to concrete, day by day choices that, as they accumulate, are the surest path to the philosophy's ambitious goals– to create better lives and a better world.¹

This comprehensive, values-based approach is one of the key ways in which Radical Decency invites change agents with diverse perspectives to join together in common cause. Because the culture's predominant values – competition, dominance and control – are infused in every area of living, Radical Decency's approach to change can unfold in any environment. Virtually anyone with a sincere interest in Radical Decency's larger goals can – and strategically should – be embraced as a partner in the larger cause. As this lesson is absorbed into our standard ways of thinking, it is, potentially, a powerful counterweight to mainstream culture's fragmenting pressures.

So for example, in most social change venues, business people are viewed as (at best) half-hearted participants. While most of their time is devoted to amoral activities, they can at least write checks. But Radical Decency casts them in a very different light. Since work is the epicenter of the mainstreams culture's values, it is one of the most fruitful and exciting venues in which to apply its precepts.

¹ This aspect of Radical Decency is a significant departure from the predominant culture's visions of change. They consist largely of high sounding goals with few, if any, practical avenues for their realization. Thus, we are told to "do justice" but are not told how. So, for most of us, any instinct to act dies with the realization that the contributions we are invited to make – a donation here, a volunteer day there – will have no perceptible impact.

What better place to work for fundamental change than in the belly of the beast? Imagine how different our world would be, if the prevailing view in board rooms and executive offices was to treat co-workers, customers, and the environment with habitual decency; if profitability was priority 1A – vitally important but clearly subordinate to the goals of Radical Decency?

The second way in which Radical Decency promotes integrated action also flows from its grounding in an overarching set of values. Seeking to be decent at all times and in every context, we are impelled to take stock of our decency efforts in every area of living.

Several years ago, I created a “Roadmap” that enumerates specific acts of decency in each area – to ourselves, to others, and to the world. That document (attached hereto) illustrates an important virtue of Radical Decency: Its ability to highlight the areas in which our decency practice needs to be improved.

Take for example, the following “action areas,” drawn from the Roadmap:

Tend to your emotional needs: nurture, companionship, novelty, play, etc. (decency to self)

“Be honest, don’t manipulate to get result; don’t mislead nonverbally” (decency to others)

“With strong emotions/different communication styles, stay open; when breakdown occurs, do repair work.” (decency to others)

“Balance resources used, accumulated, offered to others, conserved” (decency to the world)

Be open, inquisitive about varieties of oppression – yours and others – and how it is resisted.” (decency to the world)

Working with the specifics of Radical Decency, most of us will quickly notice that our practice is fairly strong in some areas and in obvious need of improvement in others. Recognizing this, we will be primed to reach out to people with greater skill in areas where we are deficient (social justice types teaching and supporting personal growth types; personal growth types teaching and supporting social justice types!). In this way, there can be a natural coming together of change agents from diverse areas of activity.

The final way in which Radical Decency promotes a coalescence of change agents lies in the habits of mind it cultivates (outlined on page 2 of the Roadmap).

Forced to confront the many complexities that arise when we seek to be decent to ourselves, even as we maintain decency to others and the world, Radical Decency is a challenging philosophy. Howard Lesnick, a law professor and gifted thinker and writer

on spiritual matters, cuts to the core of the philosophy's intellectual and emotional challenge, in Listening for God, when he "cautions against" "taking the rightness of parental preference for granted" in a society where "the degree of parental preference is far too extensive to be morally justified."

All too frequently, there are no obvious or easy choices. We are regularly stretched to harmonize and integrate what often seem, at first blush, to be inherently conflicting priorities. And, given the culture's predominant values, we need to persist despite the many situations in which our choices will be misinterpreted, misunderstood, or simply ignored.

But these difficulties are, in fact, one of the key benefits of the philosophy. Seeking to be the best we can be in these "wisdom stretching" moments, we are pushed – at times of reflection – to cultivate our creativity, thoughtfulness, intuitive awareness. And at times of choice, we stretch our analytic skills and are required to exercise both courage and prudence, as the situations warrant.

Most of all, however, Radical Decency cultivates a deepening sense of curiosity about every aspect of living – from the subtleties of own thoughts and feelings, to the intricacies of an intimate conversation, to the historical forces that repeatedly result in violent social upheaval. How else can we be the creative force we aspire to be?

And as curiosity and, with it, our insight and empathy become consuming pre-occupations, the culturally engrained habits that separate us from others – judgment, possessiveness, greed, need to control – begin to wither, crowded out by new habits of living.

As this process takes root, our approach to other change agents will be equally altered. Instead of seeing their efforts as different and unrelated, or in competition for scarce resources, we will be primed to be deeply curious about their goals, insights, approaches to change, and specific tactics. We will be on a path of deepening collaboration.

Roadmap for Making Radical Decency a Reality in Your Life

Part One: Action Guide

Applying It Radically:

----- Being Decent -----

----- In All Situations and Without Exception -----

(1) Respect	(2) Understanding and Empathy	(3) Justice and Equity	(4) To Yourself	(5) In Every Interaction*	(6) In Every Area of Living**
Express yourself with civility, make space for others	Be open to different outlooks, beliefs, communication styles	Be open, inquisitive about varieties of oppression – yours and others – and how it's resisted	Maintain physical safety	Be attentive to present moment; engage others where they are; be curious	In all areas of living show up, partic, engage; offer your ideas and energy
Presume good will of others and the value of their contribution	Seek to understand others on their terms – make sense of their world	Balance resources used, accumulated, offered to others, conserved	Create, maintain economic viability	Listen fully to words/nonverbal cues; help others to feel fully heard	Hold, act on group values, sacrifice for larger good, help to build consensus
Set appropriate boundaries; chose appropriate level of intimacy	Seek to understand others' feelings – what it feels like to be them	Have RD guide what you buy and where you buy it, how and where you invest	Tend to your physical needs: Medical care, nutrition, exercise, rest, etc.	Understand/be open & vivid with your thoughts & feelings, as appropriate	If impt principle – keep dissenting, chall group think, persist in lookg for creative solutions
Be honest; don't manipulate to get result; don't mislead nonverbally	Offer kindness, caring, nurture, and support	Resist injustice & indecency in all its manifestations	Tend to your emotional needs: Nurture, companionship, novelty, play, etc	With strong emos/ diff communication styles – stay open; when breakdown occurs – do repair	Seek to understand RD contribution of others – their insights, approach, specific tactics
Be accepting of areas of difference – as well as areas of agreement	Accept /appreciate acts of kindness, caring, nurture and support offered to you	Seek accountability for RD, justice, equity in every area of living	Respect yourself; respect your bio & psycho processes and rhythms	Model and invite mutual and authentic contact in every interaction	Contribute to, integrate your RD efforts with, collective RD efforts

* Applies to interactions with others, and to these ways in which you manage/mediate your internal voices

** Areas of living: Family, friends, communities (professional and leisure, formal and informal, virtual and face-to-face), work, public affairs, the environment

Color Coding

Red Active support from culture; a priority for most

Orange Some support from culture; often subordinated to “Red” activities

Blue Mild support from culture; routinely subordinated to “Red” activities

Green No cultural support; few make it a priority; most don't consider it

Brown No cultural support; opposition likely, if effective; few make it a priority; most don't consider it

Keys to successful implementation:

- Make work, the epicenter of the indecent cultural values we seek to transcend, a central focus
- Support -- from within (techniques to maintain intent, focus, persistence)
 - from others (actively invite it from family, friends, co-workers, colleagues)
 - in the larger world (participate in/help to create communities of support and action)

Part II: Outcomes
New Habits of Mind That Result
From Radical Decency and Support Its Practice

At Times of Reflection:

Approaching all things
with curiosity. → → →

At Times of Action:

Making choices with
discernment. → → →

A better life.

Curiosity: The desire to explore and understand thoughts, feelings, and actions beyond your immediate understanding; inquisitiveness. [The opposite of curiosity: Judgment].

Curiosity is cultivated through:

Intuitive Awareness –

Sensitivity to non-verbal cues; body and sensory awareness; ability to be fully present in each moment.

Creativity – Expressiveness; imagination; being open to possibilities beyond your awareness; exercising your speculative faculties.

Thoughtfulness – Open-mindedness; tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity; the ability to deeply consider life’s deepest dilemmas.

Outcome when you are habitually curious:

Insight – The ability to understand who you are and what drives you; who others are and what drives them; the complexities in each situation.

Discernment: The ability to balance diverse considerations; to make good choices with regard to your actions and your reaction to actions of others. [The opposite of discernment: Judgment].

Discernment is cultivated through:

Analytic Skill – Understanding diverse factors at play in each situation; ability to see patterns and themes; intellectual persistence

Courage – A willingness to act despite fears, to risk; persistence, determination, tolerance of pain for larger purpose.

Prudence – Self-regulation, self-control, humility, patience, balance, an ability not to act.

Outcome when you are habitually discerning in the choices you make:

Wisdom – Ability to sit with seemingly irreconcilable positions; to learn from these “wisdom stretching” moments; to have this knowledge inform your actions.

Radical Decency is its own reward. When all that you do is approached with curiosity and discernment, you will have an increased sense of:

Living in the present

This leads to less shame, guilt, and remorse about the past, fear and anxiety about the future.

Appreciation, empathy, and acceptance for yourself and others

This leads to less judgment, jealousy, possessiveness, greed, need to control.

Clarity and coherence about your priorities and choices

This leads to less anxiety; an increased sense of ease in life.

An ennobling sense of purpose

This leads to less hopelessness and mistrust; an increased sense of vibrancy, aliveness, and pleasure in living.

