

Meaning, care and adversity

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The pace of what is happening in the world right now is astonishing, almost frightening, and probably alienating for many.

I turn on the television news, and the pictures of crowds in conflict with security forces could be in Caracas, Portland, Minneapolis, Tehran or somewhere else that has erupted in the course of an evening.

The threats and pace of abuse from Trump are deliberately disabling the senses: the intention is to numb us as recipients of news until shock ceases to be a reaction, and for some, this is clearly working.

The sense of bewilderment in a world that is clearly going mad is real.

The guilty desire that the violence might be contained elsewhere and, by chance, leave us unaffected to continue our lives, even if they are diminished by the sense of increased risk, is, I think, apparent to many.

The cry that "someone should do something" is very obviously going unheard as our so-called leaders sit like nodding dogs once did on the back parcel shelves of cars, offering their consent without comment to whatever abuse next happens in the world.

Frustration rather rapidly turns to resignation. "*What can we do?*" is the obvious question to ask when law enforcement officers in the States can with apparent impunity shoot those they take a dislike to in the face, and then be granted support by the Federal administration on the pretext that the person they killed was not just the "f**cking bitch" the perpetrator described them as but a "left wing terroist" as the Vice President called them - both without a shred of evidence, of course.

The question is the right one. What can we do in the case of such hideous violence and the very obvious lies being peddled to supposedly justify it?

The options are, as whenever we face a situation requiring a decision, fourfold:

- * Ignore it
- * Walk away from it
- * Reframe it
- * Respond by taking action

There are never more options than that.

On this occasion, many will be tempted to ignore what is happening. That is how fascists get to power. It is the response on which they are relying, given they know few have the option of walking away from them: the whole point of fascism is to deny that chance.

Some will reframe this. There are, in essence, two ways of doing so. You embrace the fascist way of thinking when you never imagined you would. Or you can realise that this form of politics is not the peripheral kind that touches on your life, but lets you get on with much of it apparently unhindered, at least on the surface of your existence. This is the form of politics that threatens your very being. That is the form of reframing that then requires a response.

The type of response matters, and the form that will work best for most is passive (by which I mean non-violent) civil disobedience. This is:

- * A refusal to accept that what is happening is right.
- * Not accepting the demand made to, for example, "other" those who are the chosen victims of abuse.
- * Remaining aware of the abuse and refusing to normalise it.
- * Finding means of support for mutual protection, not least of mental health, when the assault on all that we thought true and of value becomes acute.
- * Continuing to imagine that a better world is possible, whatever the evidence to the contrary, and to work for it in any way we can.

The point to remember here comes from [*Viktor Frankl*](#): *he argued, based on his personal experience of Nazi prison camps, that people can endure almost any hardship if they can find meaning in it, but they can collapse even in materially adequate conditions if life becomes purposeless.*

Meaning is not, then, a luxury; it is a requirement. It is the psychological foundation of resilience, moral agency, and hope. And that is what this form of response to the crises we now face requires. In the face of oppression, the threat of which is growing, we have to maintain our own meaning, or we cannot survive. This is the politics of care in

adversity.

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