

AXIOM 2

A tool is only as good as its user

This axiom seems obvious doesn't it? Yet how many highly schooled, subsequently licensed professionals have you gone to for help who didn't seem to know what they were doing?

Doctors? Lawyers? How many licensed builders, plumbers, electricians, carpenters have you hired that did poor work? How many licensed psychotherapists that are bad at their job? How many massage therapists? How many certified car mechanics? How many certified or licensed or degreed anybody for anything?

What this real world experience reveals is an inescapable, apparently counterintuitive, truth. And that truth points up a flaw in the western world's assumptions about schooling and licensure and its lesser sibling certification. Specifically: the processes rationalists insist are adequate to train people in the use of their chosen tools, when viewed from the outcomes the majority of people experience, doesn't work. And tool use, of course, is involved in just about every profession human beings engage in.

Most people are not used to thinking of science as a tool. But it is. Or medicine. Or law. But that's what they are. They are tools, just as hammers and screwdrivers and language are tools. And it doesn't matter the tool that is used, it's only as good as its user.

The assumption that an ascending series of educational levels, each dispensing a more complex body of information, which is then followed by a period of hands-on experience, and finalized by comprehensive licensure or certification testing seems to be a rational means to produce competent professionals. But quite often, it doesn't.

Most rationalists, understandably, assume the failure is because the system has not been applied stringently enough. So, they expand the system further, more pressure is applied, testing becomes more complex and rigorous. Continuing education credits are instituted of which more are needed every year. And yet again it fails. Over and over again.

Doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results is not rationality but the behavior of a disordered mind. Yet, the western system is wedded to this approach which is clearly failing every time it is tried. The truth: there is something wrong with the underlying assumptions that give rise to the model.

There are many dimensions to the learning of any craft. And they often matter far more than what rationalists include while training someone in the use of a discipline's tools. What is important is *how* the tool is used. By this I don't mean what rationalists commonly think it means. To be sure, rationalists *think* they are teaching people how to use tools but in actuality they are not. Or to put it more subtly, what they are teaching is the simplest, most reductive use of tools that it is possible to teach. The mechanicalistic use of tools. The reason is because this is the only dimension of tool use that is amenable to the rationalist approach. The more important dimensions of tool use are very rarely taught or tested for. In fact, in most educational and training processes, such teaching is often actively discouraged. And it is discouraged for the most basic of reasons: the most important dimensions of tool use are very hard to test for. (They are also terribly frightening to the rational mind.) This is because they are nonrational in nature, rooted in the aesthetic and feeling dimensions of our human experience, dimensions that are concerned with phenomena invisible to the rational mind. *How* a tool is used does not mean the merely physical applications of the tool, i.e., the demonstration of tool mastery in three-

dimensional space, judged by a certain number of competence determinants. At the simplest, these subtler dimensions are focused on the sophisticated use of both *eros* and *ethos*.

Eros refers to the feeling dimensions of a human life which includes, but is not limited to, such things as love and sensitivity to the mood generated by a person, place, or thing. Ethos means an allegiance to utilizing the tool well which includes, but is not limited to, the drive for a high degree of competence in the three-dimensional use of the tool, a deep sense of service to the craft, a commitment to developing ever more sophisticated understanding of the tool and the craft of which it is an element, and a drive to incorporate eros – which is understood by all true artisans as essential to mastery.

In medicine, for instance, if eros and ethos were considered essential to the use of the tool, it would mean training young physicians in empathy, in the art of loving those who come to them seeking help, in establishing rapport, in sophisticated use of language to foster effective communication, in dealing with the psychological ramifications of suffering, in the encounter with death and the understanding of its inevitability. It would mean having a deep empathy with the organs of the body, with the body itself, during both surgical and non-surgical interactions. It would mean knowing the limits of the system of healing being used. And it would involve taking as much time as that person needed during every office visit or healing session.

Such a training would avoid limiting medicine to drug dispensing, diagnosis based solely on guesswork (unfortunately common) or on machines. It would not view the body as a machine or the person as irrelevant to the disease which is occurring . . . or as an impediment to the process. It would mean understanding that becoming a physician was not, at its core, ever a means to accumulate wealth.

In short, allopathic medicine would be taught as an art form that demands of its practitioners the sophisticated development of the aesthetic sense as the core attribute of the tool being learned. For what is true is that the more the aesthetic sense is developed the more the tool being used is guided by that aesthetic sense. And always, when it is, the more elegant and effective the outcome. The ill, encountering someone trained in this way would never experience what they commonly do experience in the American medical system. Certainly, medical care would not be one of the primary sources of bankruptcy.

And this is true of whatever tool there is.

But of course, this kind of training is very difficult for it works with invisibles, dimensions of human experience that can be felt but not reduced to mechanical bits which are then measured on paper tests. And, to make things more difficult, the training of new practitioners, whether of woodworking or plumbing or law or massage or medicine, would depend on teachers who themselves were proficient in the *how* of the tool being used. To create such teachers would mean the disassembly of current approaches, the abandonment of the entire system of reductive rationality as the dominant paradigm now in place, a recognition of our epistemological error, and a kind of humility that few licensed, degreed professional or the systems that produce them would be willing to embrace.

Nevertheless, this is the task that faces us as a human species . . . if we wish to survive.

Everyone of us experiences every day the outcomes the current approach generates. It can be most obviously seen in the destruction of the biosphere upon which we depend and from which we have emerged. What we see in the exterior world is what reductive rationality always produces – for neither the world nor any of its parts are composed of mechanical bits that can be

manipulated for our ends without severe consequences. Nor can nature be controlled, ordered, forced to march to the human drum. The experiences we have with physicians, the medical system, the legal system, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, massage therapists, and so on *ad nauseum* merely reflect the outer damage we see around us every day of our lives.

And yes, I do hear, and understand, the objections. For it is true, there *are* some very good tool users that come out of the reductive system. (Still, think to yourself, how many of them are there, really?) It is not the system of training that produces those excellent tool users. It is the tool users themselves. For there is something inside them, something they bring to the training that produces this kind of mastery in the use of the tool. Always it is an invisible thing: a calling to the craft, the love of what they do, a sense of service to a greater good, and a stubborn refusal to give up those invisibles no matter what pressure the system places on them to do so.

That they exist is not a sign that the system works but rather a sign of the endurance of the nonrational realms of life that are core to the emergence of what is best in us. Love and compassion and empathy and most importantly the willingness to be in service to something much larger than ourselves. To healing or the Earth or the written word or to the complex meanings that reside inside musical notes that when composed through the aesthetic sense bypass the rational mind and touch what is deepest in the soul.

Neither reductionists nor their teaching and testing methods will ever understand these phenomena, why they are important to becoming a human being, or why they are crucial to our survival as a species. And that, simply, is the source of much of what is wrong with our world.