

How To Get Real

"What we need most, is not so much to realize the ideal as to idealize the real," said H.F. Hedge.

Ideals arise from our use of imagination.

Our imaginations can create unbelievable worlds to live in. They empower us to make sense of descriptions remote to our times or foreign to our experience.

When reading Plato, we may visit an Ancient Greece we never actually knew; and when hearing a lecture on Quantum Physics, we may see the interaction between subatomic particles even though they are invisible to the naked eye.

Using imagination, Mozart heard silent music and the Wright brothers created a vehicle that could fly through the skies.

Using imagination, Tesla simulated electrical devices that he later brought into physical manifestation.

Einstein considered imagination more important than knowledge.

Our imagination uses what we do know and reconfigures the remembered sense images into something unique.

Imagination more than any other aspect of our minds has created us as an intelligent species and woven a civilized world around us.

Unfortunately, like all other things in this realm of duality, imagination, too, has its shadow side.

The most familiar aspect of the shadow side of imagination is the creation of neurotic thought patterns, such as regretting the past or fearing the future.

Idealism, an aspect, of imagination, nestles in a gray light. The bright side of idealism is that it creates a target to raise us above our present standard. The shadow side of idealism is that we tend to disdain the permutations of reality and create frustrating expectations.

Our idealism turns against us when we mistake our image for reality. When this happens we are caught up in a neurotic loop of perfectionism. At it's extreme, perfectionism is a form of insanity called obsessive-compulsive behavior.

It is when we start to feel that what we are and what we do is "not good enough" that we start to dip into the shadows. Life is messy, flawed, and imperfect, and when we place demands on reality that can't be met then we set ourselves up for frustration, disappointment, and illusory hardship.

The antidote to the extremes of idealism is realism or simply appreciating what is. In a forest, for example, all trees are beautiful, and it is only an arbitrary distinction to say that only trees that are straight are worthy of our admiration. Similarly, in life, many things are attractive, both in nature and in our own man-made world, and it does not benefit us to always draw rigid lines on how things should be.

An ideal is like the horizon. We will never reach the horizon, no matter how fast we travel because it always recedes. However, the journeying does us good. When we can appreciate how far we've come from where we used to be, then we start to benefit from our journey.

Idealism, when tempered with realism, creates a satisfying outcome to any endeavor.

Accepting what is, letting reality be itself, is a beautiful thing.

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