

Let's Schmooze

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Using Reason & Insight to Find Wisdom

Everybody is constantly looking for *usable wisdom* ~ a most elusive quarry. What is the right thing to do at any given moment? If we do the right thing, good things should happen. If we do the wrong thing, not-so-good things will probably take place. "Being wise" is a steady goal for any sentient being that prides itself on being "intelligent."

Historically, there seem to be two distinct paths to wisdom. One path is using *inquiry and reason* to get there. The other path involves using *listening and insight* to arrive at the same goal ~ usable wisdom. Before we explore these two paths further, let's take a look at humanity's historical approaches. We'll use Europe as an examination point.

For our present-day purposes, Europe's approach to finding usable wisdom can be charted along this time-line ~

- ▶ ancient Greek thought
- ▶ ancient Roman thought
- ▶ medieval Christian thought
- ▶ late-medieval Enlightenment thought
- ▶ late-medieval Renaissance thought
- ▶ Modernity thought

These historical periods are dominated by the *inquiry-and-reason* approach, with the exception of one of them. Medieval Christian thought was characterized by the *listening-and-insight* approach.

That's interesting. Over thousands of years, we have had an almost uninterrupted approach of *inquiry-and-reason*, punctuated only once by the *listening-and-insight* approach. At first blush, these two approaches appear to be diametrically opposed.

When we try to determine the best way to go using the *inquiry-and-reason* approach, we first ask questions, and then attempt to use logic to answer those questions. It's a strong approach, and has worked well on many occasions. However, when the *inquiry-and-reason* approach backfires, it is usually either because (1) it circled back to erroneous grounding assumptions, or (2) it was handled with preconceptions and prejudices. It's a simple fact that logic is no better than its starting point. It's also a simple fact that preconceptions and prejudices keep the reasoner from "following the evidence" with an open mind.

When we try to determine the best way to go using the *listening-and-insight* approach, we define the problem as best we can, and then we listen with a quiet mind to see if the solution "pops in." It too, is a strong approach, and has worked well on many occasions. However, when the *listening-and-insight* approach backfires, it is usually either because (1) our mind was not truly quiet, or (2) we filtered the insight through our wants and desires. It's a simple fact that a busy mind blocks insight. It's also a simple fact that wants and desires distort the insight.

Interestingly enough, these two seemingly disparate approaches can be utilized in a blended fashion. Obviously, the key is ~

- ▶ not to utilize erroneous grounding assumptions
- ▶ not to entertain preconceptions and prejudices
- ▶ to quiet the mind
- ▶ to quiet personal wants and desires

If we can do this, we might have a chance to blend reason and insight together in a unified approach to usable wisdom.

Most of these four keys have something in common ~ *personal ego*. It's personal ego that holds preconceptions and entertains prejudices, keeps the mind busy, and harbors personal wants and desires. If we could set personal ego aside for a moment, then we're down to guarding against erroneous grounding assumptions. The key is humility ~ the antithesis of personal ego.

The humble thinker sets aside personal ego and checks against erroneous grounding assumptions. Then, something great happens. That thinker/listener will find that reason helps us understand insight, and that insight illuminates reason. The disparate

becomes unified and focused ~ just like a laser beam. And just as a laser beam can cut through almost any material object, the judicious use of reason and insight together can yield useable wisdom and offer practical solutions.

That's all it takes ~ a quiet mind, a humble attitude, and a willingness to both "follow the evidence" and to "listen to one's gut." If it's done correctly and honestly, insight will illuminate reason, and reason will help us appreciate our insights.

Therein lies *usable* wisdom.

~ 'til we meet again ~