

Some thoughts on the theme

### The Traps of Good Intentions and the Question of Instrumentalisation

By “intending something” we mean directing the mind’s attention towards something that it has set as a purpose. The question is: who sets the purpose? Are people using this faculty for themselves or are they doing it for the alleged sake of someone else (who might then be restricted in their ability to set their own purpose)? Good or bad does not make much of a difference here. The question is rather a matter of partnership, collaboration, ownership...

A more basic question about “intending something” involves the directionality of the mind’s attention. This directionality of intention is quite different from free-flowing attentiveness; in fact, it implies tension toward a focus. (In this directionality the world is reduced to a resource and therefore easier to handle.) Here one could discuss at what point in a process either open attentiveness or focused intention would be needed. The degree of “unknown” that one is willing to accept could be a factor in this. By “instrumentalising” we mean turning something or someone into a means to an end — for a purpose or an aim. One can instrumentalise a stone to open a nut or a person for doing something he/she is unaware of or would not agree to. But what if the other person agrees? Instrumentalisation is not an issue in that case. But the question of intentionality (intending something) remains: instrumentalisation always implies intention.

What is interesting in art is that the artistic process usually requires a phase of free-flowing attentiveness. This is important in order to shift from concepts to sensory perception. And so, asking about the potential of art or artists in processes of peacebuilding, social transformation and international cooperation will automatically raise questions about the role of intention in such processes.

Good intentions: why can they be a trap? One reason may be that if a situation or someone is really in a bad state it might be very difficult to bear, even for someone else (whether a person or a foreign organisation). Especially if this observer is fine, or pretends to be fine (even to themselves), or feels that the bad state has something to do with their own position. Since just watching the bad situation of others is difficult to bear, the observer will go into action. And the first trap thereby is to direct the attention to the others and – in the heat of the action – intend something for them, leave them out. The second trap for the observer is to direct the attention only to the others, and leave their own state or needs (maybe even what it needs from the others) in the dark. The third trap is that the observer might thereby tend to concentrate on the symptoms, because to get at the roots one probably has to include all sides in one’s view. So – if what was said above is correct – a fourth trap of good intentions might be that of too much intentionality.

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