



the architecture of human nature

INDIVIDUAL SYSTEMICS

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Good people - bad world:

Why just being good isn't enough to improve the world



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Chapter 1: Towards a better world

The world is full of good people - and it's been that way for quite a while.

Almost all religions, spiritual movements, consciousness-schools, philosophies, educational projects and policy initiatives share that goal: the development of mankind and making the earth a better place. With so much effort and labor, you would think we would have reached the finish line by now. But just like the horizon, with each new effort made, the distance to this goal seems to move further and further away.

If we look to the outside, into the mirror the world provides, we see very clearly that something is wrong with us. The huge mountains of debt - even those of developed countries, the unjust distribution of wealth, the pollution of the oceans with toxins and plastic waste, deforestation and soil erosion, air pollution levels, the many wars and frozen conflicts, the millions of refugees. Some of these problems are generated at a higher level - for example, in politics or in the financial world - so that an individual can have very little influence on them. But even at these higher levels there are people making decisions and taking action who very much want to be seen as good people. But what is good and what is not?

Napoleon and, yes, even Stalin and Hitler still have millions of fans: the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela too. In between, we have the whole range of human meanness and kindness.

And on the normal level of the reality of our everyday life, even more things happen that are not easy to categorize. We know that the bargain price of the t-shirt bought without a second thought could only have been achieved under inhumane manufacturing conditions; we know that the long journey that we are making only for our pleasure harms the environment; we know that we would fair just as well with a smaller car or a simpler smartphone.

The sheer number of relatively small acts of fraud and waste add up to huge problems worldwide. The ever faster growing exploitation and wastage due to ever cheaper food, clothes and electrical appliances; the self-exploitation that comes into our lives with modern media and which penetrates and commercializes the private spheres of life ever increasingly - all of this we are well aware of and yet it always gets more -

instead of less.

How can this be, with so many good people around? When does the tide turn and take us back to a world that is truly in balance?

Do you know a single place on this earth where everything is in order?

Sometimes it seems this way when we are in love, traveling, or in a particular community. But if we look closely, we realize that the goodness of the situation has been attained by excluding some basic aspects of the human condition.

Lovers have their deep confrontations still to come; the traveler is in the privileged situation to move on at any time; special communities live according to rules that can never apply to all people.

If you and I could determine how this world should be - would it then be a really good place? Are we mostly good as a whole? And does something really good spring forth in the world as a result of our goodness?

I've have searched for a long time, but I do not know a single place in the world where everything is permanently and comprehensively in order. This realization leads me to my central question: Is it enough to be a good person? According to my definition, good people are those who work to ensure that they themselves, as many other people as possible and the earth are all doing well.

To this end, I see only two plausible paths: one, we have to intensify our efforts a bit more. There must be even more commitment and willingness to help, even more of helping people to help themselves and even more environmental protection. For this purpose, better logistics, more efficient technology, cheaper medicine and fairer trading conditions are needed. This is the common logic that soothes us with the promise: work at it a little harder, soon we'll get results.

Or the second approach: there is something fundamentally wrong with our goodness. Its lack of success is part of its nature. Unless we understand this, we will chase the mirage of a good world just as the donkey chases a carrot. The donkey only keeps trying because he doesn't see, who is holding the carrot.

If I were to heed the first statement, which says that we only need to put a little more effort in, I could give you hints and tips on how you can strengthen your positive, loving, supportive, respectful and compassionate qualities. I could tell you what you can do to more effectively be a good person. That wouldn't be a wrong thing to do. It would probably help to improve the world a little.

But because this approach has been pursued for so long by so many people, I would like to make a new proposal: let's try to understand our own good will better.

Chapter 2: In the gray-zone

Seen from some distance, most people do indeed look really well. They smile, they joke, they show themselves to be reasonable, interested and polite. They have a decent job, are decently dressed and have decent hobbies. They would also agree with the statement that many beings and the earth as a whole should be doing well, not just themselves. Many can even prove that they're actually doing something particular to reach this goal. They help neighbors or refugees, sort garbage, get involved in environmental protection, take the train, invest in their development of consciousness or donate money for good projects. Once we zoom in and get to know a person and their living conditions, we enter a gray-zone in which the good and the not-so-good seem to be inextricably intertwined. Decent and committed people can prove to be surprisingly selfish, unreliable, narrow-minded or lazy. They turn out to be arrogant braggarts, sniveling egoists or irresponsible daredevils. Here it seems to wholly depend on what perspective we adopt: Is the glass half full or half empty? Does not everyone have good and bad sides? After all, we're all just human beings. He doesn't mean it like that. No one is perfect; everyone has their faults. Basically, we all want the same thing. In the gray zone you get stuck in the hedge of thorns like the hero on his way to Sleeping Beauty. Eventually, a motivational speaker happens to drop by and encourages us not to give up in trying to be a better person and creating a better world.

What we usually don't realize is that this gray-zone is not an accident. It is not the random by-product of a complex system. On the contrary: it is a central design

principle of many living systems. The psyche loves this gray area and it is actively involved in its development. Like a school of fish, which is so big, fast and agile that you can no longer detect and catch a single fish, each psyche produces a refined simultaneity, ambiguity and opacity. It hides its deeper attitudes and its distinctive intentions. By doing so, it also keeps our own consciousness away from our inner reality. Because even our own consciousness gets caught in the gray area, we never know whether we are really good people. The state of the world testifies against it. But perhaps it is, after all, primarily the others who are to blame?

In order to provide clarity, we need to somehow penetrate this gray-zone, this simultaneity of good and somehow not so good. We need to understand the rules by which it is constructed.

The main basis for this is: the psyche is a living system. It consists of many independent players - just like the whole world. We don't have one single will; we have many competing centers of will in us that behave like completely independent persons. These inner persons have different needs and abilities. Some are serious and goal-oriented, others playful, while yet others are spiritual or completely devoted to relationship. And each of them is trying to assert itself and expand.

One, two or three of them are the reception committee for the world. They provide the decent and normal impression as we so like to do. They understand what is expected of a good person and they are trying to fulfill it. First when you get to know a person better can slowly the other forces be recognized. They hide behind the reception committee until they are sure that they can show their inclinations and idiosyncrasies without endangering themselves: for example, when the wedding is over and everyday life begins or when the probationary period has been successfully completed and the employment contract has been signed, or when nobody happens to be looking. They are most evident in people who believe themselves to be unassailable. The attitudes that are visible then are usually a little less classy, cultured and enlightened. And behind them others still lie hidden. They only come to light when existential danger is present. And behind them hide the ones that nobody is ever supposed to catch a glimpse of.

The human system thus has a visible surface - the reception committee - some intermediate floors and a hidden depth that no one can reach. That's exactly what the

inner persons love. Now, they can appear as they should and still do what they want. The individual players can alternate with lightning speed, they can remain undetected in the background whilst taking action or they can pretend as if they weren't there at all.

Just like in a school of fish, no superordinate will is necessary. The individual participants in the system do it instinctively. Unlike a school of fish, our individual wills, however, are much more differentiated and contradictory - and smarter. Thus, not only our fellow human beings are confused, but we too along with it.

Chapter 3: The players in the system of the psyche

We have now taken a decisive step in understanding the gray-zone: we understand that the confusing simultaneity of good, less good and not good at all follow a certain pattern which is generated by different actors in a self-organized play.

But that's not enough because we have to figure out how good or bad the individual players are in detail. For this purpose, we also would have to examine and question them individually. Interestingly enough, this is not such a difficult undertaking. The easiest way is to start with the most visible representative of the welcoming committee, because he is usually the one that can be seen most anyway.

We just have to look carefully: *How* does this part of a person behave that is completely on the surface of the system? Is it funny or shy or responsive? To be more exact: if it's funny, *in what precise way* is it funny? Does it make jokes about itself, about others or about situations? Are the jokes crude or sophisticated? If a person appears shy: in what way exactly is the person shy? By not saying anything? Or by not saying anything of importance? By evading eye contact? If it acts obligingly: in what way is it obliging? With a servile attitude or with proactive liveliness?

Just why exactly do we want to know that? In order to give it a name? No, much more: to become like it ourselves! We are now infiltrating the system of another human being by becoming very similar to a part of him - the part which is visible at the moment.

Suddenly there are two of them. And the one player - that's me - directs his whole attention to the other player - that is the part in the person I am working with.

This is a whole new experience for him. He can now say and do what he wants: I will stay on the heels of this one will as his doppelganger. I follow no aim except this one: find out *who* he is.

As a trained member of the reception committee with several decades of experience, the part of course knows exactly what he needs to do to satisfy me. With jokes or shyness, eagerness or sluggishness, kindness or indifference or whatever its preferred way is to receive the world. And I stay there, always keeping at it, always staying like the part and always in agreement with the respective situation. A dialogue unfolds between us which is more like a dance than a conversation, because we conduct this dialogue simultaneously in five languages: the body, the emotions, the inner images and the energy level play just as much of a part as the spoken word. This can sometimes become really amusing - this common dance of two such similar dancers.

Let's suppose, that in this case, my dance partner is a particularly zealous obliger. I rummage in my stash and dig out the zealous obliger in myself. (Not so difficult for me, I really have one). Then the two of us accommodate each other very eagerly. We assert ourselves on both sides, ready for all possible concessions; not only here and now, but later again and towards others as well. We tell each other about the joys of being obliging, of our struggle for more cooperation, of our contributions and initiatives for a better world and of our selfless attitude. This all sounds very nice and true. We're witnessing a meeting between two real friends of humanity.

Strange thing is: even though we are now meeting each other so extensively and obligingly, no sense of connectedness or closeness really wants to set in. While our thoughts, memories and protestations, even the emotions we express all share a common thread of unity - this unity doesn't really come into being between us. I bring this perception into play: "In spite of everything, I still feel as if I have no real connection to you," I tell him. To both our surprise, his mood darkens. "Of course not!" he replies, visibly annoyed - and even surprised by his own answer. "That's actually not what it's about either!"

But what else should a will be interested in which is so obviously focused on being obliging? We both have no clue.

And at this point we can't know it yet either. To find it out, we continue to dance together, but our dance has now changed: The somewhat stressed mood and clear perception of the distance between us, we integrate into the dance. And the longer we dance, all the more evident it becomes that this will actually wants to be left alone - and that is the exact opposite of what he first claimed. At the end of a long dance, which has led us into deeper layers of this will, he can say the amazingly simple, true and unambiguous sentence: "I'll give you what you want so that you leave me alone!"

The whole person to which this will belongs is now more than surprised. He had always thought himself to be someone who was accommodating towards others; who gives more than necessary and who gives more than most. And now he has to realize that this is precisely what holds others at bay. That he gives in order *to not have to give* his real gifts anymore.

The dance has not yet come to an end. There's still one round to go. We now know that the will, which is on the surface a great obliger, is in its depths an objector. But what it is refusing and why is still unclear.

We dance together in denial - a tedious, slow and difficult dance, which barely moves from the spot. He would most like to stop altogether now, but I will not let him, I urge him to continue dancing. And slowly from his tenacious shuffling and limp gestures arises only a nudge, a tussle, then a pressing push, a suppressed threat; then after having firmly collected himself, an angry exclamation: "Go away! Let me breathe! I'm different from you! I'm me!"

Like a warrior who breaks the chains of his captivity and recaptures his freedom, he stands in front of me with impetuous force. He once again knows, who he once was - and who he still is. This discovery makes him happy. He now dances a new dance, the dance of his independence, strength and dignity - and he shares it with me. Only now does he really give. He gives of himself.

Chapter 4: Blind will

This is the second great insight on our way to understanding the gray-zone that the psyche produces: not only the system as a whole has a visible surface, a number of intermediate floors and a hidden depth. No! Every single player in the system also has a visible surface, a number of intermediate floors and a hidden depth. The will on the surface of the player is not identical with his deeper nature. Compared to its deeper nature, at its surface the will is distorted, weakened or even turned into its opposite. Each actor creates their own gray area. The result is that the actor has lost access to his deeper power and love. He can and he wants to give of himself no longer.

But the individual players in us do not know that. Their consciousness captures only a tiny part of its own reality. They possess an extremely resolute will but are as blind as a bat. In this state of blindness, they pursue goals that they themselves do not know and understand.

Our obliger vigorously pursues the goal of being left alone. To do so he uses the obliging as a tool: if I give you something small, or at least promise something small, without you having to ask, then you'll leave me in peace afterward. This type of giving is not really a gift, not a potent contribution. It is a deal in which everyone ultimately is cheated.

If you take a look at the world you see this principle everywhere. On the shampoo in the supermarket is written: New! Now with precious almond oil! Below the image of a magnificent almond blossom can be seen. In the small print on the back, you will see that the almond oil is contained only in homeopathic doses, and the majority of the product is made up of cheap chemical products. Not written there at all is that the almond oil is obtained at the cheapest possible prices by means of exploitation of illegal migrant workers and due to declining groundwater levels and high pesticide use. The whole thing is officially called a WIN-WIN: We get the precious almond oil, or at least the feeling that we have obtained almond oil without having paid much for it and the manufacturer makes a nice profit and attains a good image too. If an NGO tries to start a probe into how the oil is produced, the manufacturer becomes an official

supporter of the NGO and puts their environmental label on the package. In parallel, it develops its own ecological line. This line happens to account for only a tiny fraction of its production but now it can always refer to it when its bad practices are denounced and good intentions are doubted. It creates its own gray area with such confusing and contradictory simultaneity that all attacks get stuck in it.

The gray-zone is always based on the same principle: giving serves to camouflage the taking, but the amount of taking is far greater than giving. It is the principle of hidden exploitation.

The automotive industry develops more fuel-efficient engines and advertises their low consumption. At the same time they sell so many SUVs built just for luxury and show to the whole world that the savings effect is quickly superseded.

Of all the electronics waste that we leave at the recycling center with a clear conscience, six million tons of it reappear shortly later at African dumps again - every year.

Hardly had the Internet evolved into a global forum that unites everyone when cool new companies emerged whose claim to power and monopoly dwarfed everything that Coca-Cola and Goldman Sachs had tried in the last 100 years. The saying went like this: "Don't be evil". The fine print said: take as much as you can.

We are told that this is unfortunately the nature of man, it is substantiated with some statistics, and it is left at that.

However, we note with growing evidence that our maneuvering room is becoming less and less. The world is getting smaller, there are less resources, the number of unresolved conflicts is increasing. The countless gray-zone tricks add up to a catastrophic wave. We can really no longer afford to just pretend that we are giving. We must turn to our own inner reality and find out how we are involved in the exploitation of the world as completely normal and obviously good people - without knowing exactly how and why.

Chapter 5: In the garden of the inner world

Let us return to our obliger. We have now brought some light and clarity to the gray zone, at least on this one point. Now we can ask ourselves: Is the will that we have just explored, good or bad or both? In what way are the good and the bad intertwined? What impact does this have on the life of the person as a whole and on their environment?

Let's recall the definition: a teammate is considered good when he wants himself and the other players doing well within the system, which includes all humanity and the earth.

On his surface, the obliger quite explicitly wanted that his environment do well. He has even helped improve things for others. But deeper down he was disappointed and somewhat withdrawn. There an area could be found in him where he didn't want to give or take anything. A dead, sad but yet very determined area into which no life and no light could penetrate anymore. Where neither he nor his environment were doing well. And even deeper inside was his very life source: full of strength, willfulness and love. This power and love had been kept hidden from the world by the player himself - without him knowing it. It is as if someone had buried a pot of gold in order to bring it to safety. First, he forgets where the place was, then he forgets what he actually buried and then he forgets that he ever buried anything.

For this will, all of this is not a problem, but a solution. We do not blame him. His unconscious chronic rejection of life and the overlying, ultimately impotent posture of giving have completely emerged on their own. However, once the obliger has realized what he has done in the darkness of his unconscious he can begin to reflect on his attitudes. He notices for the first time the advantages and the disadvantages of his solution. He perceives what it costs him to renounce his deeper giving and he perceives what it costs the people around him. For the first time he understands why others get nothing despite his so obvious efforts. Now he can change himself by means of his own will. He doesn't call himself obliger anymore either. He now knows that he is actually a champion of self-determination and calls himself "Nelson".

The obliger alias Nelson was only a part of the reception committee. Behind him still live very different wills, every one a caliber of their own kind. In the same manner, we can now investigate the mind of this person systematically.

With each new encounter, we see the same principle: almost every inner person has a surface that conceals its original nature and expresses it only in twisted form. Almost every one of them travels with at least one foot on the brake or they give gas in the wrong places or can only turn the steering wheel in one direction.

The inner world of each person is a jungle of unconscious attitudes which are one-sided and have become chronic, of which nearly each at a critical point says no to life or to the people. A huge mess is the result. We create this mess ourselves.

But - and this is the really good news - we can systematically investigate and clean up our inner world. We can see through the deliberate confusion of the gray-zone and make the attitudes hidden therein visible - the good, the not so good and the not good at all.

Such an investigation leads us into the depths of the individual will-sources where their original essence-like nature is hidden. An essence-will is delightful in itself, nourishing and satisfying. It wants to connect directly with people. It enjoys bringing his character into play. And it wants to take the time to handle things until they really are in harmony. It senses when something is good and well-rounded and then it is satisfied. This type of relationship is not a deal, but a mutual gift.

This is a new way to cultivate our humanity and life energy and to unfold. Just like in a garden we can turn to each source of will, care for them, raise them and bring them to bloom again. The systematic cleaning of the soul allows us to penetrate the inner gray areas and dissolve them bit by bit. The less we need the inner gray-zones, the less we will produce them outside of us. Perhaps it will in this way be possible for us to make a world that does justice to all, because we again have the desire to give it our all.