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2022-23 Kandidat #35

Attention – pure and generous?

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity” – Simone Weil

In today's society one could argue that the thing we chase and what measures our level of success is the attention we receive from others. We live in a world where social media has become my age group's main source of attention and validation. In the quote above Simone Weil states that attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. In today's society we have a great need for attention and to satisfy those needs we often turn to social media and other ways so quickly receive attention and validation. We accept whatever attention we receive, but does it, in our society, really exist a pure and generous form of attention?

A PR-coach might teach that there is no such thing as bad attention and that all attention equals good attention. In my generation, maybe there is some truth to that. People like Andrew Tate can become rich and famous for their atrocious views because people find it entertaining and it stands out from their everyday lives. Maybe we have too much access to people who crave attention, that we give our attention to what stands out the most. Or maybe it has gotten so difficult to receive attention that we feel the need to take on controversial views in order to fulfill our need of attention. Because of this, I see the need and constant craving for attention as a crucial problem in our society.

However, attention isn't necessarily a negative thing. I would divide attention in to two categories; the need for superficial attention where the need is created by the pursuit of money, fame or recognition, and the need for genuine attention from the people we love and care about. In the latter category, it doesn't have to be attention from family, friends or another loved one, but from whomever that cares about you and what you have to say. I would also say that there is a great difference between giving someone attention and genuinely paying attention.

Paying genuine attention to someone and their feelings and thoughts is something I would say that a lot of us rarely do. When conversing with friends and people in our everyday lives we often tend to listen just in order to be able to express our points and views back to them. We only pay attention so that we can receive attention in return, and that form of attention is neither genuine nor pure. Those sorts of superficial conversations were neither of the parts involves pays attention to the person to learn and because they care about the other, can't be

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seen as two parts giving each other genuine and pure attention. And that raises the question; what is genuine and pure attention?

Very few words have only one meaning, and I would say that none of them only have one interpretation. Attention isn't only one thing and because of that it can't be categorized as good nor bad. In the quote above Simone Veil clearly thinks that attention is a good thing, she goes as far as to call it "the rarest and purest form of generosity". I believe that pure attention is the attention you give to others without expecting something in return from them, other than to understand them better. When you love or care about someone you give them attention because it gives you and the person joy and a sense of well being, there is no ulterior motive.

As Veil also brings into light in the quote, that form of pure attention is rare. Unfortunately, I believe she is right. Maybe you can explain this with the idea that humans are naturally selfish and egotistical, and that this has caused us to constantly crave superficial attention from others and made it more difficult for us to actually pay attention to the people and minds around us. Maybe we don't feel like we gain something from giving someone else our full attention or maybe we just don't care enough about others.

I don't believe that humans have stopped caring about each other, but I believe that the way we care about each other and the way we love has changed due to numerous factors in our society. Social media has given us a platform to receive attention whenever we please and therefore increased our need for attention, but at the same time it has also damaged our ability to give someone genuine and pure attention. We are now left with a generation that desperately craves attention but is unable to give it.

When in class I notice how a lot of the questions people ask aren't necessarily connected to what the teacher is lecturing about and that a lot of the outbursts that are phrased like questions really aren't what they present them to be. A lot of people place a question mark behind what really is just them expressing that they have knowledge of something in order to receive attention. The same thing goes for regular conversations and debates. When talking to someone in a class I notice that they aren't really paying attention to what I am saying, but instead preparing in their head what they're going to answer me.

I believe that Veil is correct when saying that attention is a form of generosity. Being generous means, in the way that I interpret the word, to give something without expecting anything in return. And with that I believe that it is important to understand the difference between expecting something in return and receiving something in return. If you give

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someone your full attention because you acknowledge that the gesture will make someone else feel good, you might receive a lot in return. You may gain different perspectives, understand the person better and even understand the world better. If we more often were generous with our attention with no ulterior motives, we might create better relationships and reduce the risk of negative conflict. If we go into a conversation clinging on to our own interpretations and ideas with no room for other thoughts, we won't get anywhere. An open mind and generosity with our attention can be a key to solving conflicts and misunderstandings.

The pure attention Veil writes about is to me completely different from the way we define attention in my generation. We crave attention from strangers online, attention based on the way we look and attention because of views that maybe even aren't our own. One reason behind why we crave this type of superficial attention is our access to social media and our generations difficulty with being generous with our attention. Pure attention has become so rare, that most of us aren't aware that pure and generous attention is a possibility.

There is a difference between what we think we want and what we want deep down. Most of us crave superficial attention because it's the only form of attention we know. There is no doubt in my mind that everyone would choose to experience the pure form of attention if given the option, the problem is that this form of attention is so rare. A like on an Instagram post might give us a small serotonin boost that becomes smaller and smaller for each like, but it can't compare to the feeling that you matter enough for someone to give you their full attention.

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