

# Attention—Wish—Will—Free Will

## A Talk by Mr. de Hartmann

### From the Diary Notes of Thomas C. Daly

In June, 1954, the de Hartmanns made a special visit to their newly constituted Toronto Group, to give a clear direction to our Work. On the evening of June 11, all the members met again in my parents' apartment, where we had originally begun as a "provisional" group two years before.

Expectancy was in the air. During the first hour, while Mr. de Hartmann gave a music lesson to someone else at a nearby hotel, Madame de Hartmann questioned each and all of us together, especially deeply: "Why are you here?—What is your aim?—And what do you wish?"

Typical answers: "To be free from ups and downs" ... "To get rid of negative emotions" ... "To become something real" ...

To each answer she countered with: "Yes, but why? Why do you want that?—One can want all such things just to be approved of by others, just to get on better in life—but why do you want that? ..."

By the end of the hour, our minds were empty of answers. We had been brought to a level of pondering we had never before experienced. Finally she planted a seed that grew inside this silence: "There is only one important thing—to actually develop our possibilities. We should not be content with anything else, or anything less."

Into this atmosphere at last came Mr. de Hartmann, and it became apparent that, instead of a reading as we usually had, de Hartmann himself was going to speak to us directly from his own experience. And he began to speak without notes and straight from the heart.

First he underlined four themes: "Attention—Wish—Will—Free Will." And then he proceeded to relate them to each other. In that atmosphere of openness, his clarity, breadth of thought and obvious wish for our own understanding penetrated so deeply that afterward I felt I remembered it almost word for word, and wrote it down as follows:

How do we perceive an object? Why that one object, out of so many? Something connects us with that one object, and not with others. It attracts our attention. We pay attention to it. It attracts our attention through one of our senses: our eye, ear, nose, and so on. Our eye, ear or nose pays out attention to the object.

Our wishes, our desires, are connected with it in some way. We want to have it; or we want to avoid it; or we want to look at it more than we want to look at any other object.

This morning I saw a dog with two small boys. Its whole attention was glued to its two masters, watching to see what they would do, which way they would go, so he could quickly follow and be with them. He had attention for nothing else. And his attention continued to be concentrated on the two boys as long as I watched. This is already a high degree of attention, even if it is only animal attention—much stronger than many humans have.

Now we come to wish. Wish is only, as it were, a mere point in space. If we only wish for an object, we will never have it. In order to possess it, we must begin to move toward it. This movement is the beginning of will. If wish is a “point,” this kind of will generates a “line,” moving toward the object, with a view to possessing it, or identifying with it.

At every level of the universe there are degrees of will. The iron and lodestone: purely mechanical will—yet it moves towards its goal. The caterpillar moves along towards the leaf it wants to eat. The dog: sometimes a dog so strongly wishes to be with his master that when the master dies the dog will sit by his grave and never eat or leave there till he dies himself. This is already a very high degree of will—even if only an animal’s will. Few humans attain it.

Thus there is an attention, and a will, for outside objects. An object attracts us; we do not attract the object. Objects govern us from outside. They make us do all sorts of things. It is not the woman who buys the hat, but the hat buys the woman. The man does not smoke the cigarette; the cigarette smokes the man, as Mr. Gurdjieff said. The attention and the will generated by outside objects, through the senses, are not our own. They are part of the mechanism of Nature: Nature works us. We do not conquer Nature; Nature conquers us. The attention and the will connected with the physical senses and outside objects are not our own. This will is not free, but answers the call of every outside object.

But there is another Attention, and another Will. Man has two natures: a lower, and a higher. The lower nature is like an animal’s—more subtle and complex, perhaps, but nevertheless it works in the same way. The higher nature is the real one. It is incomplete, but capable of growing into a full and complete Man.

For the higher nature, there is another Attention, and another Will, not born outside of us, but born in us. This Attention is the beginning of real Consciousness; and this Will is the beginning of Free Will. With this Attention, we can observe ourselves; with this Attention we can remember ourselves. With this Will, we can make efforts to attain our greatest aim: to complete ourselves.

But we must actually will it. Knowledge is not enough. It is good, and necessary, of course, but of itself it will change nothing in us. Understanding is necessary. We must have new knowledge: for instance, in order to know what can be wished. But unless we actually wish it, we will have no chance of obtaining anything. And wishing alone, is also not enough. We can wish forever, but unless we move toward what we wish we will never obtain it. We must will it.

But we do not have enough Will. And we do not have enough Attention. So we must increase them as best we may. And the only way to increase them is to make the right kind of efforts. Without efforts, nothing can increase. But if we turn all our Attention, all our Will, and all our Efforts, towards our big Aim, little by little, like the caterpillar, we will approach it: the big Aim.

Later, verified with Madame de Hartmann, who made a single small addition as printed above.