

The Fourth Cardinal Sin of Thinking: The Unfair

by

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Life is unfair. There are no declarations, contracts, scriptures or any such writings which proclaim life to be fair. And yet, for some reason, most people believe life is supposed to be fair, reliable, and predictable. It's somewhat understandable when children scream out "that's unfair!" But, as adults, it's somewhat juvenile that we continue to hold on to this idea. We may not blurt it out with the innocent outrage of a child, but we think it with just as much vehemence. Perhaps we were past over for a promotion, terminated from our job, caught in a traffic jam and already late for a meeting; perhaps we find ourselves married to a person we only recently discovered is an alcoholic or perhaps everything is going extremely well for us and then we are diagnosed with a serious illness. Life is just so unfair! We get mad at life. We get angry at God. We become bitter and caustic.

It might be different if our philosophy of life were not based on this assumption that life is fair. We wouldn't get so upset when things that appear unfair happen to us; we might just shrug it off as "that's life." And, indeed, some people do just that. They have a different philosophy and a different collection of words and phrases they use within their mind when life hits them with unfair situations. They don't complain or criticize; they don't get bitter or caustic about life. What is it these people have? The answer is simple. A different philosophy; a different belief. Different internalized self-talk.

The assumption that life is fair is one of the several irrational beliefs we hold and which can cause us to get upset, depressed, angry and even self destructive. It is a belief which demands everything be going the way we expect it to and that nothing bad will happen to us. It is a position of privilege – and arrogance. It is self centered, ego centric and very small minded. Anyone serious about improving their life, feeling better about themselves and the world in which they live will need to uproot any belief they have that life is fair. Sometimes bad things happen to good people – and sometimes good things happen to bad people. That's just the way it is. But, that doesn't mean that life is unfair – all the time, as an absolute. Life may indeed be unfair, sometimes. But, it may be fair at other times. But, the blanket statement "life is unfair!" is unconditional and absolute and that's what makes it so irrational.

Life's fairness or unfairness is really not the issue. The issue has more to do with "deserving." Many people, and in particular those raised in the post industrial western world, believe they deserve. They deserve a good, high paying job – right out of college, they deserve a nice

home, they deserve to be treated with respect and love. And when they don't get what they believe they are entitled to, well, life is just so unfair! But again, there is nothing written in stone stating that everyone shall receive what they believe they deserve. However, it may well be that everyone does in fact receive what they do deserve, even though it may not be to their liking. The popular saying "you may not get what you want but you get what you need" has some merit. There are several world philosophies which expound the doctrine of cause and effect suggesting that our present condition, no matter how positive or negative, is the effect of previous causes which we ourselves initiated. Be that as it may, every single person is faced with a host of situations throughout their life which appear to be unfair. Life is unpredictable. The only question of any value is how do you respond to life? And then, are there alternative responses which may bring about more positive consequences? For, although life may not be fair to us, we can choose to be fair, just, honest, kind, compassionate and understanding, towards life. Does this mean we should become pollyannish? Not, of course not. Tough love, a firm hand and discipline can just as easily play a role in appropriate responses to life's unpredictable unfairness as can leniency, mercy and forgiveness. It all so much depends on the situation at hand – and the response ability of the actor. The more responses one has in their repertoire, the more choices one has; and, the more choices one has, the more able is that person to act in a manner which is appropriate, as opposed to being merely reactive, imprudent and rash.

One of the better methods of counteracting our belief in the lack of fairness of life (so often sourced in self centeredness) is to volunteer in civic activities which help support those who are disadvantaged. By so doing, we find life's unreliability, unpredictability and capriciousness something which can add meaning and purpose to our life, not to mention a new, broader perspective on the plight of others – and maybe even some compassion.