

OF A DELICATE INSIGHT | OaDI



**On Behaviour: Support**

By Christopher J. Hill

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**“EACH GLIMMER, an OFFER of COMFORT  
& Shelter in Gentleness”**



**„JEDER SCHIMMER, eine QUELLE  
des WOHLBEFINDENS  
& Geborgenheit in Sanftmut“**

## On Support & Etymology as a Factor of Support

First of all, let me say that the following words describe my thoughts and ideas and thus are not necessarily universally or specifically representative. So, what you make of them is at your good liberty and discretion!

I've lived for a bit more than 29 years, at the time of writing this, with my conditions (Asperger's, ADHD, Dyscalculia and OCD). I've seen many degrees, many sides of them. Some are lovely and beautiful, some grimmer, darker, some more difficult to bear than others. All in all my outlook and ethos remains that they are highly fascinating and integral aspects of all things I encounter or touch upon in my life and with my life, literally and figuratively. It has since become a philosophical exploration of study, observation and much learning to find ways of understanding what I experience. Building on that I figure out means to move through those things. It's a learning curve, in essence, like anything else in life is as well. What these conditions mean to me, they might not mean to you or anyone else for that matter. It's incredibly difficult therefore to say what they mean for they mean so much. It took me a decade of active inquiry to get to this conclusion and it's really nowhere near conclusive or final. I try to focus not on the conditions themselves, but on how I can adjust myself to the things and people around me in a practical manner. I know that certain challenges (cf., *Herausforderungen*) come from these conditions, others stem from circumstance and yet others I've found have been self-imposed. They stem from insecurity, vulnerability, from troughs in confidence, from simply being overwhelmed and needing time to figure it out. All of these insights are tangible yet elusive to me. To find a practical way of thinking and embodiment therefore often feels better and more effective than "only" looking broadly or specifically at my conditions. For some time now, and I can't tell you exactly how long, I've mulled over much of what is going on in our society and how different people deal with these conditions in their own way. I so wish to share my own.

My experience is that life, and though this might seem grand (it is), maybe obvious when rendered in words (it is), though true it is nonetheless: life is profoundly complex. I do well to remember this now and then! Things I've learnt to appreciate over the many years include the intense, incredible value of support; that struggle & strife are instructive and important; that I must understand my vulnerability in its many facets; the search for a sense and feeling of gentleness (in German, *Sanftmut*, a wonderful word expressive of a "gentle mood or disposition") is a constant and continuous one. These are only a few artefacts. The connection I have with my parents, my mother in particular, the perspective I receive from my dad, and the support my aunts and family have and continue to provide is different from a non-neurodivergent person perhaps (according to the thoughts of Sue Fletcher-Watson, writing for the University of Edinburgh, neurodiverse(-ity) pertains to a group,

whereas neurodivergent describes an individual (2020)). The reliance on, the need for support can be greater. It is my normal; it is my typical (though I cringe at these words). Nowadays, they bear a terribly sentimental, almost clichéd, sickly-sweet ring. They are perhaps also a little overused in my opinion. I tend not to make much of a thing of it, preferring to get on with it as I'm not very "emotional" about these conditions. Though I feel them and I feel through them. My mother was there from the beginning. She realised something was going on due to her background as a Speech and Language Therapist. Her fight and efforts led to recognition and diagnosis. She was there throughout therapy, throughout all things my life has touched upon and of which she was able to partake. This and my own acceptance of my need for support (**acceptance** of it, not submission to it!) have been essential. The balancing of support against the desire and inner wish for autonomy (not necessarily independence), well it has shown and taught me the manifold, critical meanings of dignity and its immensely elusive profundity in life.

If we so think of *support* as more than "just" assisting a vulnerable person or a person living with a condition (of whichever kind), it becomes an aspect of life. It is a deeply human thing which we do to various degrees anyway. To paraphrase, the word literally means something like to carry someone from underneath, from below (2022). We only perceive it as being "different" or a "special need" when we think of supporting vulnerable people or those with conditions. Arguably thus, personhood is set aside and the focus is trained upon the condition(s) as the defining factor; the person is no longer a person, but a thing to be studied and interpreted. In other words, all are experts apart from the neurodivergent person (Brooks et al., 2017, p.2). If, as a (neurodivergent) person, I am left out of the picture and not given a place or space in which to unfold, I cannot thrive. So much should be known, yet we *have* to observe neurodiversity and study it. Though, observe here also a sense or feeling of irony! We cannot allow the neurodivergent person entirely to become an object of study. Studying your neurodiversity and learning from it is one thing. Turning a person into a thing to be probed and prodded until the *other* doing the probing and prodding has enough data in order to formulate a coherent, academic, scientific theory or categorisation is something else. From a filmmaking perspective, and I cringe at the use of this term, we need a new *gaze*, the *neurodivergent gaze* or the *gaze of neurodiversity*! That is, no matter what the format of our (creative) practice. We need to delve into and explore *neurodivergent subtext* (or the *subtext of neurodiversity*)! We need to delve into and explore *neurodivergent subtlety*, its intimacy, vulnerability, its privacy, its modality and find a proper, good place for it. That too is support. And we need to take that seriously, aiming less at "emotional sympathy" and more towards proper integration and acceptance.

Going back to the thoughts on the complexity of *support*: the danger is that one can become too dependent on that support and thus forfeit autonomy previously gained. This of course depends on the capacity of an individual to be autonomous. I appreciate that not everyone is in my position and

able to say such things. Still, I can only speak from my perspective. It is a complex fabric of interplay in which autonomy may unfold only when, as a person, I'm given the place and space to learn to be autonomous, through struggle as well. Thus, if too much support is given and too much is "done" on my behalf, my experience is that I began / begin to rely on that assistance more than it was / is good for me. In effect, I had to learn to become a person again: of my own autonomy and personhood. Vice versa, if too little information is communicated and too little assistance is given, I find it difficult to make sense out of what I'm offered. That leads to despair and frustration of not getting anywhere, while having to find ways to "guess", more or less, what others are trying to tell me. The trouble with "guessing" is, well what that guess might conclude as being pertinent may not actually be the case! That leaves feelings of helplessness and again – despair! Each small glimmer can and does hold an offer of some sort of strength, comfort, and insight. It holds the potential for new understanding and appreciation of the workings of my fabric of life. That is and will always be my ethos, my philosophy, my anchor. You see, some sort of interpretation is thus always going to be necessary. Thus this life calls. Therein lies another spring of good strength: having to learn to interpret those small glimmers & whispers of support. Yes, they may be more difficult to grasp but hold their just value. Getting out of self-doubt and the noise of insecurity is crucial though neither straightforward nor simple. Here often movement is what helps and to believe in what I'm doing, nourished through feedback and constructive critique which has taught me what is good and what needs to improve, or could be improved, say in my poetry. Having someone trustworthy who'll be honest but not blatantly or hurtfully so, helps. An understanding of the meaning of the word "draft" or the term "work in progress" is also beneficial. Most (creative) processes are iterative, the initial idea, intermediate stages and the end result not necessarily the same thing. If something is not good, then say why. If something is good, then do so also, for only so can one learn from critique. This too is a form of support and assistance. Movement in this sense need therefore not be limited to a form of physical movement. Though it helps of course to take a walk, let thought wander, to practice critique of the self, reflect and study thought, learn from it and from perspective. I stress mental movement, movement of the mind, of memory, movement of the self as critical as well. That can unfold from the inside as well as from the outside: e.g., through conversation, allowing myself to branch out in my thoughts, by observing different ideas from different sides, a process which I have called *endodialogue* (something like "within through reason").

I've learnt to recognise a profound soul of honour and privilege in the act of supporting others by being supported by someone (yes, grand choice of words and I'm going for it, for my choice isn't at all as grand as you might think it is). I say this for those who support, when they support, they take on the responsibility for another person's wellbeing and dignity, their worth (2022) in other words. (cf., German *Würde* which seems to have unfolded from the word "Wert" (2022) meaning *value* or *worth*. Further in the past this apparently had its origins in "werden" (2022) which means *become* or *will be*. The latter part of this etymological thread is a fascinating new insight for me! I had a hunch

about this origin since *Würde* is identical orthographically, apart from the initial lower case, to *würde*, which means *would*, in German the second subjunctive of *werden*. I never confirmed that until now). Why this etymology is significant? Well, in keeping with reflection and being reminded of things, the past meanings and history of words gives insight to their original value. It offers refreshed understanding of their meaning. As just iterated, it reminds us of what certain things did mean, still mean and what meaning may yet still be unfolded from them.

Now, returning to the thought of the profound soul of honour and privilege, of course this will vary from support to support. A colleague or friend, helping out on a creative project in whichever capacity, won't be responsible in that sense. A support worker or mentor assisting potentially vulnerable persons in an official capacity, well that's a different matter again. I've nonetheless learnt, having tasted the benefits of being on the receiving end of either type of support, to appreciate it in either of these cases (of course these are not exhaustive examples). A bit of honour and privilege, a breath of it, does shine through even in creative things. Think about being entrusted with a draft which may not be the best it could be, or being entrusted to uphold the confidentiality of a work. The person sharing might be deeply insecure or unsure about their work and trust the other not to share it, maliciously "borrow" or "steal" from it (which is, it need not be said, bad practice and unethical). They'll trust to receive kind, supportive feedback on it, not excluding critical guidance. They might need that kind of uplifting reassurance, offered and given honestly and patiently so as to help that person reach their potential and embody it (yes indeed, *reaching* and *embodying* are two different things). You might say I'm being too detailed and slightly overthinking it. I don't think I am and I will now leave this thought suspended here ... again this might be obvious when written or spoken out, yet I do well to be reminded of this now and then.

Going back to the subject of supporting potentially more vulnerable persons, here is why I speak of honour and privilege: those who support perhaps even speak for that person or step in when things get too much for that other. They act as a shield, a bridge or advocate, and thus bear that person's voice when they represent them. They allow and help them to be a person. This incredible aspect we must not forget! I'm profoundly grateful for the support I have received from my family, friends, colleagues, therapy or my maths teacher in technical college. Support from NAS, the HSCP, or student support at UWS has been vital. The support for my ideas from my lecturers on the HNC / HND, from my dissertation supervisor on my BA (Hons) or later on my MA was critical. Without that support I wouldn't be able to do what I do today. Not always am I able to show my appreciation (which is frustrating and painful). That among other reasons is why I write my poetry in *Of Echoes & Dialogues*, a place to describe what I wish to say yet which otherwise might feel difficult to convey. I don't necessarily even think that my autism or neurodiversity is a "barrier", per se! Now, before this goes in such a direction where voices will say, so let's stop helping neurodivergent people, let's stop funding support and let's even stop the support because they don't have a barrier, we shall stop here and think! I'm only talking from a perspective acquired through at least 21 years of continuous

therapy, mentoring, support, still ongoing self-study and critical, reflective examination. I've been pushed and challenged to do better, to grow, all of which was a form of support. In this instance I only speak for myself! I don't represent anyone else! So there's a bit more to it than that. From my point of view my neurodiversity is my wiring and the baselines of how my brain works, which affects everything else as an aspect of all things. What I mean is that things like communication, understanding of others, reading between the lines, these may be categorised initially as areas of difficulty. Those are, however, things which I have found I can learn by listening and observing. I grant you the application of those skills requires effort. The fact that I can work them weighs more than the effort they command. I'm saying that if you, as a neurodivergent person, have the capacity to move and to learn, then there is no reason why you should not do so. I like the word *capacity* as it refers to being able to hold something (2022). It's thus a perfectly neutral term to describe ability, strengths and weaknesses. It has no limit as capacity can be increased as much as it can stay the same or decrease from time to time. I think it's a fairly elastic thing. Where my resolve comes from, I do not necessarily know. When I'm down and I see darkness I try to understand it and for some reason I begin to challenge myself! Critical of myself, I search for ways out again. If in doubt, I ask for help, which usually takes the shape of a call to my mum, the result of which usually tends to be: so where's the problem? Get on with it! Usually anyway, I say with a pinch of salt! Having a chat is always good yet often not easy to arrange. Going into a dark state isn't the thing of the matter, getting out of it is. Every time I get out of it I know I can do so again if need be. In my experience you can never know the limit of your own capacity until you have reached it, though equally, it's never easy to say or determine where that limit truly lies. The only way ahead therefore is to assume that what you believe to be your limit might not really be it. In other words, go by the good old scientific method and disprove your limitation as a limitation! That's the tricky part! It's hard, it's tough, but when you emerge and unfold on the other side, you'll stand tall and stronger, wondering why on earth it took so long! Or in the wonderful words of Nick Cave, the sentiment of which I love and hold true: you have to keep on pushing that sky away! (2020).

Thus, while I recognise that my conditions are an integral, fundamental constant, their manifestations aren't necessarily constant. Like my capacity to manage life, so too do my conditions and their individual manifestations appear relatively fluid. They are at times more strongly pronounced, at times stable, at times lesser pronounced. Reflecting on this I curated the concept of *neuroharmony*. I imagined it as an achievable state of acceptance in essence, first and foremost, of their presence in the fabric of my being. It means neither peace of mind nor struggle. *Harmony* comes from **ἁρμόζω** (harmózo), meaning "I fit together" (2022). I like that idea of joining together, agreeing (2022), beyond which, things are a matter of negotiation & navigation.

So, I said I don't think my neurodiversity is necessarily a barrier "per se". Mark the term "per se", literally "by itself" (2022)! I mean to say that sometimes, when I reflect on situations in the past, I

realise, it wasn't my neurodiversity which stopped me or held me back. It was my perception of it that stopped me from moving. It was my feeling of "inability" or "I'm autistic and thus can't" self-talk like that, which I was introducing to my thinking, which held me back. Of course this can't account for every instance in which I felt things were difficult. Though I believe many situations and circumstances were down to that kind of self-imposed limitation. To explore my struggle & strife and to reflect upon it is always going to be difficult and uncomfortable. However and nonetheless, I take comfort from the idea that strength and resolve, dignity and worth, resilience and patience can be attained therefrom. Support can unfold and manifest variously and I wouldn't limit it by categorisation or application. Forms of support in an official capacity, e.g., by a charity or medical professional, will require training and safeguards, no doubt about that. Yet I want to allow it, on a philosophical level, to unfold as a universal asset. It has to be rightly balanced. Too much of it can cause reliance and becoming "lost" in the need for support or assistance, too little can cause despair and frustration. It has to be a dialogue. How much support in the end might be or is right, that I cannot say. Also remember that those who live through struggle & strife need not necessarily fear it, for they already know it. This doesn't necessarily ease the way upon which you tread, though I feel comforted by the thought that therein lies and lives an offer of patient, perhaps also gentle, strength and an engine of my being. I think this knowledge allows the unfolding of what I have called *neuroagency*, an ability to work with my neurodiversity in a critical and informed way and manner.

I would thus like to end with a wonderful sentiment from David Bohm, from his book *On Dialogue* (2014), even if slightly paraphrased. In essence he intimates that one should try to attain an awareness of the movement of one's thought, an understanding of it and its subtle, tacit nature (2014, p.91). Whatever this might unfold to mean to the individual I'll leave at the liberty of the individual to decide. I always felt that, ever since I read his book, it gave me a more profound, deeper understanding of what to strive for and what to aspire to. We need the courage to enter this dialogue, critically, gently, with patience, and without the fear of saying the wrong thing or that offence will be offered. The fear of it might tell you that you might offend, though it needn't be so. Either *other* should then try to be lenient and try (yes, I'm saying "try" because leniency can often be difficult to offer & uphold) to understand what the *other* means.

All in time, and all in its good place we might find good judgement and attain movement.

Thank you.

3,525 words.

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