

Transparent

A transparent gown, thought, or political administration can all be seen through. One looks at the object and through it, and therefore can understand what makes it tick. In the moral sphere transparency is in our day widely touted, as a pathway to reliable behavior and good governance. Such transparency, the argument would go, is in itself a virtue. But is not human culture full of examples of transparent dictatorship, cruelty, or public behavior? Stalin and Mobutu openly signaled their punches in advance, and were known from prior writings or sayings to be ready to do what in fact they did, trample on human rights. Mustn't we mean, when we say how much we value transparency, that we value knowing what we are buying, when we go into the marketplaces of power or influence? Even if it kills us?

Transparent

Examples

1 Children who snatch a forbidden candy from the kitchen cupboard are usually pretty transparent. One look at the face, and the crime is evident. Adults, though better at such deception than children, are also easy to see through. If I've got one on for my neighbor's wife, it will show—in the way I talk about her, in our body gestures when we are together. If I want to kill your pit bull you will know it from the way I behave in your house, when the creature comes up and licks my pants leg. Why are even trained spies fearful that their work as double agents will show in their gestures and speech? Is it because the secreting process leaves its mark on the texture-tone of the whole person? Is it because deception is so inimical to human development, that for our sakes deception-indicators have been built into our nervous systems?

2 In the presence of a 'spiritually pure' person we are likely to feel both awe and a sense of the person's transparency. The Dalai Lama and the current Pope are symbols of such maturity of presence. We sense in both of those men—I have met neither, and for me they are products of media formation—that they are above holding petty secrets, or secreting thoughts they would not share. Common sense, however, suggests that such a degree of transparency is unlikely, even in such figures. Common sense, of course, means my own small ambit of moral housekeeping. I personally must, for sure, combat vengeful, lustful, self-destructive feelings, and do so hourly. (At least in my waking state; sleep may repair some of this damage.) I cannot imagine the texture of my conscious life stripped of the buzz of discord. 'How,' says the shrewd duc la Rochefoucauld, 'can I fail to take pleasure in the misfortunes of my fellow men?'