

The Act of Enquiry

By FP

When as children we go out to play in a playground, we run around regardless and leap on and off each ride joyfully for hours – usually until a tired or bored parent manages to pull us away. Why do we find such amusements so captivating? In themselves they are not much mechanically – metal and wood arranged to swing us, spin us, slide us. But perhaps what is happening is far more fundamental to our development than the mere game. Perhaps what we are experiencing as children is an exploration of two worlds – that of space/time and that of the imagination.

As we take these rides, we move up and down, or from side-to-side. We experience safely the limits of our body and our fears; how high dare we climb or swing, how long can we hold onto the climbing bars. The playground is our environment writ small, safe for practice.

Each jump, each reckless leap, each count of ten, is an enquiry made in two worlds; an enquiry of the environment around us and our body, and an enquiry made within the mind beholding it. Firstly, we are asking ‘what happens if,’ and ‘can I?’ when each action is undertaken. In our imagination, we enquire to see if we desire the action – we imagine ourselves heroes swinging across deep chasms, or world-class athletes breaking a racing record. Perhaps in our imagination we are asking ‘am I able?’ in a safe place, a place where the price of failure is limited to the laughter of our peers rather than the loss of a war, a relationship, a life.

The simple machinery of movement intrinsic to any park finds various analogies in our later life. As our enquiry widens and deepens, we age and enter a more complex playground, where up is not always higher, where down can be the place to be, and where circles rarely return one to the same place.

Let us redefine the playground in our lives, then. Look for the slides, where opportunity opens up and for little effort you can position yourself for an exciting free-fall, albeit briefly. Take a free gift, a free trip, go to a museum or a lesson in which you can partake for a while. Experience the thrill of unknown consequence. Perhaps you might prefer the swings; first you must decide if you have the energy to launch yourself, or if you require the assistance of another. Save up ten pence pieces and go and splash out on a new book, bag, hat or ornament. Ask someone to tell you of a favourite place of theirs and go and visit it. Research a famous house extensively, build it in your imagination, and then go and visit it for the first time.

Children do not tire in a playground, and resent being called home for two reasons which we, as children writ large, should avoid forgetting, lest we become less than we were; that our imagination is boundless, and that we have not yet exhausted our enquiries.

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