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Disappointment

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Editor's note

Disappointment: A Powerful Emotion

Disappointment is the emotion that comes when expectations are not met. Almost all humans experience disappointment at some point in their lives. Humans strive for something in order to achieve a goal. As such, desire is needed for experiencing disappointment. As compared to other animals, our executive function ability allows for delayed gratification towards the achievement of a longer term desired objective. With this comes hope and expectation. When the goal is not accomplished, we may experience disappointment in the form of sadness, unhappiness, dissatisfaction and frustration. Whereas desire can be important for achievement in one's life, the disappointment that comes with it can be a double edged sword. On the one hand, it challenges us towards bigger efforts and improvement, on the other hand in narcissistic vulnerable people, disappointment can come with maladaptive defenses and narcissistic rage, which can cause interpersonal violence in a physical or psychological way.

Let's use love for example, every person is looking for another person that can fulfill his or her own narcissistic needs. These needs will vary for each individual and can be conscious or unconscious. Take for instance one person may be looking for a more physically attractive partner, while another one may be looking for a more professionally achieved partner. At an unconscious level, one individual might be trying to avoid abandonment from people that resemble his neglecting parent. When expectations of being loved are not met, the narcissistic defenses are often tested. Fighting, acting out, hateful feelings, etc. can happen. Disappointment is not only an individual emotion; it can affect a whole group, a community or even a nation. Maladaptive disappointment can also lead to international violence and wars.

Disappointment can limit the freedom of a person, as the relative happiness and satisfaction will be dependent on meeting the expectation created individually by each person. In that case, this emotion will be triggered by external circumstances blinding the person to other sources of satisfaction in their lives. Disappointment must be regulated with temperance. That way we may have more joy, freedom and well-being in our lives.

Fernando Espi Forcen, M.D., Ph.D.

Icons of Psychiatry

Disappointment: Freud On The Moses Of Michelangelo

Carlos Espi Forcen, Ph.D., Department of Art History, University of Murcia, Spain

Needless to say, the Moses of Michelangelo is one of the most celebrated masterpieces of the history of art. It has been praised by artists, connoisseurs, critics and philosophers ever since its creation, in part due to the fact that it is a mature work by probably the best sculptor of all times: Michelangelo Buonarroti. It was commissioned by Pope Julius II in 1505 as part of a



projected giant tomb that had to be housed in the new Vatican. The tomb was never finished and much more modest version was installed in the Roman church of San Pietro in Vincoli. The Moses of Michelangelo also caused the admiration of the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, not so much for its beauty or aesthetic accomplishment, but for the slippery emotional state that the Florentine artist rendered on the face of Exodus figure. In his 1914 essay “The Moses of Michelangelo” Freud first admits that he has no expertise in art, “nevertheless works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me”. Even if Freud was not an art historian, he carefully reviewed what had been written about the Moses of Michelangelo in this scientific scope. He read the work of the most prominent art historians of his time such as Jakob Burckhardt, Carl Justi or Heinrich Wölfflin and he realized that they generally agreed that Michelangelo had chosen to represent Moses in the very moment that he had just seen the Hebrew people worshipping the golden calf right after coming down from Mount Sinai. Invaded by a brutal

feeling of disappointment and anger, he was about to relieve his fury by jumping from the seat and throwing and breaking the Tablets of the Law:

“And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain” (Exodus 32: 19).

Nonetheless, this generally agreed view towards Michelangelo's sculpture clashed with his static position and the evidence that Moses was not about to stand up and start an energetic action. Freud realized that a Moses that was to guard the pope's eternal rest meant to be eternally sitting and never spring to his feet. Thus, Michelangelo would have imprinted an eternal emotional state on the sculpture beautifully described by Freud as follows:

“In his first transport of fury, Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tables; but he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still, in his frozen wrath and in his pain mingled with contempt. Nor will he throw away the Tables so that they will break on the stones, for it is on their especial account that he has controlled his anger; it was to preserve them that he kept his passion in check. In giving way to his rage and indignation, he had to neglect the Tables, and the hand, which upheld them, was withdrawn. They began to slide down and were in danger of being broken. This brought him to himself. He remembered his mission and for its sake renounced an indulgence of his feelings. His hand returned and saved the unsupported Tables before they had actually fallen to the ground. In this attitude he remained immobilized, and in this attitude Michelangelo has portrayed him as the guardian of the tomb. As our eyes travel down it the figure exhibits three distinct emotional strata. The lines of the face reflect the feelings, which have won the ascendancy; the middle of the figure shows the traces of suppressed movement; and the foot still retains the attitude of the projected action”.

It is therefore disappointment, deception, anger and frustration that is contained in the frozen semblance of the Moses of Michelangelo, a disappointment that would not turn into wrath so that Moses could always fulfill his task of protecting the tomb of Pope Julius II.

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Essays

Disappointment

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What is disappointing? Is it that feeling that one gets when their parents shame their children in such a way? Is it the feeling you get when you thought something would happen but it doesn't happen? Is it to be expected? Rejected? Reviled? I wonder if disappointment could be embraced? Still expected and not necessarily viewed through that eye which we eye the things that we like so much, but rather that eye that lets us know that this does not mean the end, but rather a beginning that we did not expect. If therefore we have a new beginning, we have a new opportunity for a moment of Awe and excitement and perhaps the ability to learn. I have had

many disappointments in my life. Some personal, some social, many financial. I do dwell on this and it is painful. Perhaps this is the deepest type of pain because many disappointments happen after one does what one thinks will be the thing to create a reward and just when the curtains open to show the prize, a big suitcase filled with shit and a man in a top-hat with a shit-eating grin

and a golden spoon is waiting eagerly to spoon it piece by piece in to your mouth so that you taste every last bit. The thing is that in life, to participate, you must eat the shit. You could run away and become a hermit and never talk to anyone again, but that choice rejects life and life, while living, is all that there is. I may paint a bleak picture, but is it so bad? That is to say that the shit is only really internalized if we let it be for, truly when we eat something it does not at all enter our bodies proper, but rather travels a journey through us but around us at the same time. Even in the shit there can be nutrients and something beneficial for us. Raspberry and



“Complex Shit” by Paul McCarthy, Balloon and Instalation in China, 2013

Vanilla flavoring for example (Google it). It is important to try to find that which will make us stronger in the pile. Each round of attempts is a new opportunity. Just because a Goomba jumped into your path as you were leaping over the canyon, causing you to fall to your death doesn't mean it is time for the game to be over. You try again and when you reach that gorge the next time, know that you may fail, but after repeated tries something magical happens and muscle memory kicks in. On future trials you wonder why it was so difficult in the first place and you cannot recall how difficult it was in the beginning. This is what it means to be an adult. It means you have eaten some shit. It means you have failed. It means that at some point, things did not go your way, but despite this you persist. Why? Because there is no alternative. You can whine and cry and act like a child. But that just keeps you stuck. Most of us are stuck. I have been stuck and get stuck all the time. But it is true that this shit too shall pass. Will there be more? Sure! – but will it disappoint?



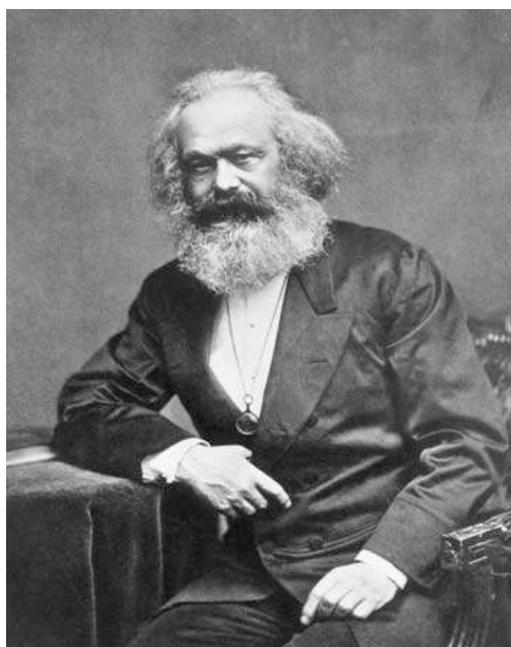
“America” by Maurizio Cattalan, Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2016

Communism: Past, Present And Future

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Communism carries a political, social, economical and philosophical movement with the goal of putting a nation's goods and wealth in the service of the community. Communism attempts to abolish private property, social classes, and money in an attempt to create a society in which all citizens work for the collective common interest.

Philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) has been generally regarded as the main figure of Communism. Marx was born from a wealthy family in Trier, Germany. His ancestry was Jewish on both family lines however his father became a Protestant in order to keep his job. Marx studied at the University of Berlin and became a follower of Hegel and Feuerbach. During his early youth, he joined the then known Hegelian movement in Germany which was highly critical of Christianity and the Prussian Government. At the age of 25 years old, he emigrated to Paris. The following year he wrote the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (1844) in which he built a humanist conception of



Karl Marx

Communism. Congruent with the philosophy of Feuerbach, he argued that in Communism, humans would work freely for the collective in contrast to the alienated labor in Capitalism. While in Paris, he met his long time friend and colleague Frederick Engels, who also came from a wealthy family in Manchester. Together they joined the Communist League, an organization of German emigrant workers in London. The league commissioned them to write the Communist Manifesto in 1847. In the Communist Manifesto, the main ideas of Communism have been explained. While both were commissioned, it is believed that Marx was the writer of the Manifesto.

The Communist Manifesto attempts to explain the goals of Communism. It argues that throughout history, since Roman Times, the Middle Ages and the current era, there has always

been an oppressing class. For Marx, in the Modern Era, a manufacturing class named the bourgeoisie arose. This class substituted the remains of the feudal system and controlled domestic and international trade. This bourgeoisie had its shining moment at the French revolution. However, in the current tense, the bourgeoisie expands and destroys the small business creating a swelling social class called the proletariat. In Marx's words the proletariat are wage-laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live. As the bourgeoisie deteriorated and oppressed the proletarians, it created a revolutionary element that led to its fall and the victory of the proletariat.

In chapter two of the Manifesto, Marx discusses that the mission of communists is to create a class consciousness in the proletariat to abolish private property and the capital. That way there will not be inequality in society. Moreover he argues that bourgeoisie's cultural values such as religion, family structure, and jurisprudence should be abolished too. He states that currently, the proletariat does not have the ability to hold any of those values due to the oppressive state by the bourgeoisie; proletarians have no space for their own values.

In chapter three, Marx discusses the current socialist literature. For him, French socialist literature is more congruent with his ideas than German socialist literature. He explains that even more worrisome than the bourgeoisie as a whole are the socialists in the bourgeoisie. He blames the socialist bourgeoisie for contributing to the miseries of the proletariat because they think that taking some social measures will solve the problem. That way, he feels they are only keeping their precarious state and the system alive. For Marx, all socialists' movements of the past have had three main problems: 1) They look to previous modes of social organization for a solution to present difficulties. 2) They deny the inherent class character of the existing conflict. 3) They do not recognize that revolution on the part of the proletariat is the only way to eradicate the conditions of oppression.

In the final chapter, Marx emphasizes that Communism is not only a German, French or English movement. He internationalizes Communism by stating that they will support any Communist revolution in every country that wants to fight the established order. In Marx's own words: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." The final statement says in capital letters: "WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"

As Marx predicted, Communism became an international movement embraced by the working class of most industrialized countries. In Germany, the Communist party became a major party between 1918 and 1933 when it was eventually banned by Adolf Hitler. In the UK, the Communist League was settled in London in 1919. Due to differences with the Anarchist movement influenced by the theories of Bakunin, the league was dissolved in 1920.

Nonetheless, the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920 and though it never became a major party, it existed until 1991. The French Communist Party was founded in 1920 and still exists nonetheless due to bad results in the elections of 2002; the party has sought alliance with other left socialist parties. In Spain, the Communist party was founded in 1920 and grew during the civil war. This party, led by José Díaz and Dolores Ibárru (Known as La Pasionaria), allied with the Republican Government and The Popular Front against the coup d'état led by Francisco Franco. Communists here sought a socialist revolution that was supported by Russia. After Franco's victory the party was banned but became legalized again with the advent of democracy in 1977. Today, the communist party in Spain is allied with other left parties forming the United Left. In the last elections they joined an emerging new left party named Podemos becoming a serious candidate for presidency.

Communism found the perfect shelter in Russia. Vladimir Lenin embraced the ideas of the West founding the Communist Party with the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1912 and subsequently leading to a successful revolution against the oppressing establishment of the Tsar in October 1917. However, as the government was formed, differences arose between their leaders. Lenin became critical before dying of the economical ideas of Joseph Stalin who eventually took power. Leon Trotsky emphasized the importance of continuing the efforts to make the communist movement international, congruent with Marx's ideas. Stalin instead proposed a socialist movement only for Russia. As a result, Trotsky was exiled to Mexico and subsequently assassinated by the Spanish spy Ramon Mercader.

In the United States, a number of German Immigrants founded the Young Communist League in New York in 1919. Today, the Young Communist League of America is still active in many cities across the United States.

In Latin America, brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro met together with the Argentinian, Ernesto Che Guevara, in Mexico and organized a revolution against the government of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba in 1953. The Guerrilla continued fighting until defeating the establishment in 1959. It is not known how familiar Castro was with Marx's ideas at the beginning but soon after gaining control of politics he established the Communist Party, abolished property and capital, and guaranteed free health care and free education. Ernesto Che Guevara later went to Bolivia in an attempt to extend the revolution to all Latin America, but he was defeated and executed. Due to health issues, Fidel Castro transferred his duties to his brother Raul Castro in 2006 who still rules the country. Communism triumphed democratically in Chile. Physician and politician Salvador Allende won the elections in 1970 and soon adopted policies of nationalization of industries and collectivization. The opponent parties declared this unconstitutional and, with the support of the CIA, led a successful coup d'état by General

Augusto Pinochet who later became the leader of the State. As a result, a little over three thousand intellectuals and artists including musician Victor Jara were assassinated.

In Asia, the Communist Party of China was founded in 1921 by Chen Duxiu and Lin Dazhao. After the Chinese revolution led by Mao Zedong in 1949, it became the single ruler party to this day. Mao differed from the Russian ideology as for him a continuous revolution would mean that there would be an enemy. Instead, he proposed a cultural revolution. His thought was reflected in his essays “On Contradiction” and “On Practice.” These essays had a great influence internationally. During the 60s, the emerging New Left in the US, and the communist parties in Spain, Belgium, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Ecuador, and Palestine became Maoist organizations. The Communist party of Korea was founded in Seoul in 1925. After North Korea was liberated by the Soviet Red Army in 1945, the Workers Party of North Korea was founded. Kim Jong-il became the leader and governed the country under the communist rule until his death. Today, his son Kim Jong-un rules the country under communist rule. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the North Korean government established the Songun or Army-first policy which prioritizes the Korean army in the affairs of the state and the political and economical life.

The ideas of Karl Marx were difficult to carry into practice in a democratic way. Most communist leaders soon became dictators. Thus, a new oppressing class was born: the Bureaucracy. While with Communism came free universal healthcare and education, as well as socialist politics that decreased infant mortality, hunger and homelessness, communist leaders attempted to control the thought, the culture and the media, having very little tolerance for alternative thinking. Freedom of thought and speech was often suppressed. Democracy was abolished. Opponents to the regime were often exiled or were assassinated. Stalin, for example, has been widely regarded as the worst tyrant of the 20th century. It is estimated that 1,548,366 persons were executed between 1936 and 1938 during Stalin’s Great Purge. Among them were the founders of the Communist party, 25% of the Red Army, American Emigres, writers, musicians and intellectuals. Executions on a high scale also took place in North Korea and in China during the civil war. Mao Zedong considered violence necessary for the achievement of an ideal society. More recently, during the 70s in Cambodia, nearly 200,000 people were assassinated. Likely, Karl Marx would have never been approving of Stalinism, Maoism and other communist crimes and these forms of oppression.

Today, Communism as a political movement has failed. While still retaining political power, China and Russia have embraced economical Capitalism. While the ideas expressed in the Communist Manifesto seem beautiful and attractive, Marxism in theory was too pure, too utopic, and too idealistic. In those cases in which communism was applied to society, it became

a form of religion in society. Communism abolished all religions to start their own. In that sense, Karl Marx became the prophet, the political leaders became the founding fathers, and the fallen leaders became the martyrs of the Communist movement often developing into the subject of idolatry. Utopian Marxism never became real. Perhaps, psychologically, humans seem to have a tendency to put their individual interests before collective ones. Nonetheless, currently in society, there is a feeling of need and a quest for political change. After the crisis of 2008, inequality has grown in society. Bankers and loaners control the capital and set high interest rates on society. Politicians belong to an elite group that support the interest of the capital and, in fact, has used public taxes to pay and help private banks. Citizen's debt has increased overwhelmingly in all Western countries. Adjusted salaries have decreased and socialist measures are being reduced or are minimal. Capitalism is taking control over education and health. Universal quality of care has decreased. Only people with good insurance and higher paying jobs have access to optimal quality care. Substance abuse in society has increased and, overall quality of life has decreased. Today, the so-called middle class can barely afford a house, a reasonable medical insurance, and the payment of student's loans and medical bills. Society has been left with a feeling that an elite political and economical class retains all the capital. Due to that, the popularity of new left movements and political parties has now arisen. In Greece, for instance, Syriza the coalition of the radical left led by Alexis Tsipras won the elections in 2015. In Spain, the new left party Podemos, led by Pablo Iglesias and Iñigo Errejón became a serious candidate to win Spain's elections. In Italy, comedian and blogger Beppe Grillo became the political head of anti-establishment, pro-environment Cinquestelle (Five Star) movement. In the United States during the recent elections, Bernie Sanders' campaign was recognized for the enthusiasm of its supporters, the rejection of large donations from corporations, and the record-breaking number of small, individual contributions. Sanders advocated for the need of universal free healthcare, free education, campaign finance reform, income equality, and social justice.

The ideas of Karl Marx are now being revisited. Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek, and Yanis Varoufakis stand out, among others, as new intellectual leaders of this social movement. However, caution must be taken. History must not repeat itself. Efforts must be made so that the atrocities against human rights, carried out by past communist leaders, never happens again. The gradual and pacific movement in people's mentality must be allowed. This change demands quality healthcare and education as a legitimate right. It stresses the need for social justice, freedom from the harsh impositions of the capital, and compassion within the human race.

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Articles

Gender Disappointment And Infanticide In Ancient Greek And Modern Era

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In ancient Greek keeping, a child was considered a conscious choice. The decision was made by the father, whether or not to keep his child. In most cases, the child was kept if it were a boy. Girls weren't usually that lucky. Having a baby girl was considered a disappointment and a liability and therefore a worry for their father. A Greek father's constant fear was his daughter's virginity. And thus, the females usually used to live in separate rooms in the second floor or rear of the house. Women were considered intellectually, morally and physically inferior to men, requiring constant guidance from their fathers and husbands.

Though infanticide was considered barbarous, ancient Greek literature and mythology are filled with events that describe child sacrifice and infanticide. The decision to kill a child was usually made by the father. Exposure was the preferred method of disposal, as the act itself was not considered murder. It was believed the exposed child had a chance of being rescued by Gods, if fate would have it. After a woman had a baby, she would show it to her husband. If the husband accepted it, the child would live but if he refused it, it would die. Babies would often be rejected if they were illegitimate, unhealthy or deformed, the wrong sex, or too high a burden on the family. Such practice took responsibility away from the parents because a child would die of natural causes for example hunger or disease.

References In Greek Mythology

These events are quite evident in ancient Greek mythology as well. Studying Greek Mythology can help us unlock the secrets of human psychology. Greek mythology is still relevant today and has contributed a lot to modern and classic literature. Carl Gustav Jung considered the founder of analytical psychology had a special interest in mythology. In a letter, he writes to Freud in 1909, "that we shall not solve the secrets of neurosis and psychosis without mythology and the history of civilization." ¹

The majority of psychological ideas ancient Greeks had (now "taken" from their mythology) are not lost, but still found, maybe in a different form, in modern scientific psychology. Even more, this psychological approach to mythology has often proved to be more than "literature," but a valid, useful investigation, capable of generating new concepts and theories.

One of the most famous stories in Greek mythology is the disappointment of King Acrisius for not having a male child as his heir and a prophecy of his death.

Famous Story of Acrisius

Acrisius was the King of Argos. Danae (Figure 1) was his daughter and only child in Greek mythology. Acrisius was disappointed that he had no son to give his throne to. So he asked an Oracle for help.



Figure 1: Danaë reclining with Zeus as the shower of gold depicted on a vase 450-425 BC (Source: Wikipedia)

Oracles were thought to be portals through which the God spoke directly to people. The answer he got was that he would never have a son but her daughter would and that his grandson would kill him. At that point, Danae was childless and to prevent the prophecy from coming true; Acrisius decided that he should lock her in a bronze chamber under the court of his palace. She was buried under, never to see the light again. However, Zeus, the sky and thunder God had seen Danae and had grown fond of her. Danae was in prison hopeless and sad when one day she saw a bright golden light appear in the tomb. It was Zeus who appeared and said, "Yes, I am a God, and I wish to make you my wife. I can turn this dark prison into a wonderful, sunny and blooming land."

One day Acrisius found out that there was a bright light coming out of the tomb and when he ordered to tear it down, he saw Danae smiling and holding his baby in her lap. This baby was Perseus. Angered and fearing his demise, Acrisius ordered to cast both of them out to sea. He didn't want to kill him since Zeus was a God. The chest drifted away and arrived to the island of Seriphos where Polydectes ruled. The king's brother, Dictys who was a kind man, caught the chest in his fishnet and saved the two. Perseus grew there to become a strong young man.

Polydectes heard about Danae's beauty and asked her for marriage, which she rejected. Disappointed and enraged, he planned to marry her by force. But Persius would not let him. He did not want to kill him outright, so Polydectes said that he would stop pursuing his mother if Perseus would slay Medusa and bring back his head. So it happened, using Athena's shield, Hermes's winged sandals and Hades' helmet of invisibility, Perseus was able to evade Medusa's gaze and decapitate her. And Danae was saved.

When Persius reached adulthood, he became a great hero and managed to fulfill a number of feats. He eventually decided to return to Argosand to see his grandfather, but after finding out about the prophecy, he changed course and went to Larissa to participate in the athletic games that were held there. What he did not know, though, was that Acrisius also attended the event. While Perseus was throwing the discus, an accidental misthrow caused the discus to land on his grandfather's head, resulting in his instant death. Thus, the prophecy was fulfilled.

Analysis:

Gender disappointment and concept of child sacrifice and infanticide is quite clear in the aforementioned mythology. It can also be found in many other societies in the past especially in Chinese and Arabic societies and their literature, the reasons usually being an amalgam of religious concepts and economy.

Economical Aspect

In societies that are patrilineal and patrilocal, the family may choose to allow more sons to live and kill some daughters, as the former will support their birth family until they die, whereas the latter will leave economically and geographically to join their husband's family, possibly only after the payment of a burdensome dowry price. Thus the decision to bring up a boy is more economically rewarding to the parents

Psychological Aspect:

Evolutionary psychology has proposed several theories for such behavior. Child abuse and infanticide have been explained by spending resources on not genetically related individual reducing reproductive success. Cross-cultural research has found this is more likely to occur when the child has deformities or illnesses as well as when there are lacking resources due to factors such as poverty, other children requiring resources, and no male support. Post-partum psychosis is also considered to be one of the factors.

Cinderella effect:

In evolutionary psychology, Cinderella effect is the considered cause of higher incidence of child abuse and mistreatment by stepparents than by biological parents. Evolutionary psychologists Martin Daly and Margo Wilson propose that the Cinderella effect is a direct consequence of the modern evolutionary theory of inclusive fitness, especially parental investment theory. They argue that human child rearing is so prolonged and costly that "a parental psychology shaped by natural selection is unlikely to be indiscriminate."³

Modern Era and incidence

These are considered to be few of the many factors for gender disappointment and infanticide in the past and are still quite prevalent in the modern age. It is important to note that female infanticide is not just ancient history or mythology, but is still quite happening in many areas of the world. US has the highest rates of child homicide (8.0/100,000 for infants, 2.5/100,000 for preschool-age children, and 1.5/100,000 for school-age children).⁴ According to the Edhi Foundation of Pakistan, which is one of the largest welfare organizations of South Asia, it is estimated that approximately a thousand infants were killed or left to die in Pakistan last year. It is important to understand the psychology and reason behind such behavior and studying ancient literature from an evolutionary aspect might help us to better understand the underlying cause.

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An Introduction To Cognitive Behavior Therapy For Depression

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When the word “therapy” comes up in a person’s mind, many picture a patient in a comfortable chaise where they talk about their feelings and the doctor passively agrees with what he/she says. It usually consists of the patient talking on for an hour and the doctor nodding his/her head without being interrupted until time is up. Cognitive therapy was first introduced in the 1960’s by a psychiatrist named Aaron Beck. Aaron Beck tested his psychoanalytic concept that depression is the cause of hostility turned in the direction to one self. He tested this idea by analyzing dreams of depressed patients and discovered that their dreams had less to do with hostility and more with defectiveness, deprivation, and loss. It then became relevant that Beck’s hypothesis that depressed patients have a need to suffer, may be false. Beck continued to study his patients and learned that there were two themes of thinking occurring during his investigation: one is a free association stream type and two is thoughts about themselves. Dr. Beck quickly figured out that all of his patients were experiencing automatic negative thoughts, and the thoughts were connected to their emotions. In the late 70s, cognitive therapy started to develop more and a study that was conducted in 1977 proved that cognitive therapy was just as effective as the antidepressant, imipramine. Due to all the advancements in therapy, psychiatrists were no longer the primary therapists; psychologists, social workers, nurses and teachers became heavily involved in the network of mental health services. In the 80’s, there was a shift of type of practice to deal with depression. Antidepressants began to be widely used by not only psychiatrists but by family practitioners. Health professionals started to interpret depression as a normal experience and the stigma of depression soon began to decrease. The National Alliance for the Mentally ill (NAMI), helped pave the road for mental health to be accepted and not to be discriminated by the general public. In the early 90’s, the use of medication seemed to be the most economical route to treat depression. This mentality of having antidepressants being the primary method to treat depression was now more popular than therapy. There was extensive research at this point to prove that both therapy and medication are effective at treating depression, and the idea of taking a pill rather than psychotherapy seemed more economical as well as more convenient. By the early 2000’s it had become apparent that patient’s personal aspects were not being

treated correctly by just medication and with numerous studies showing therapy plus medication has superior results than one alone, therapy and medication became the common regiment for treating depression.

Concept

CBT on a simple level, is the interaction between emotion, behavior and thought. Each subtype in this triad can affect the other two. In other words, an emotion can cause a person to act and think a certain way, a behavior can cause a person to feel and think a certain way, and a thought can make a person act and feel a certain way. Usually, there is a trigger that causes a person to fall into this cycle. There is no single cause of depression, but there is evidence that shows there is a chemical imbalance when a person is in a state of a depressed mood. Depression is a mix of a chemical imbalance, psychological components of thinking and feeling a certain way, and social life factors.

The main concept of CBT starts with a core belief. A core belief is the most fundamental level of belief. They are universal, firm, and overgeneralized. An example of a core belief is a patient believing that they are “inadequate”. Once the core belief is established, the intermediate belief will be the link, or intermediate step between the former “core belief” to the ladder, “automatic thought”. Intermediate beliefs are rules, attitudes, or assumptions. Therefore, an example of an intermediate belief is “it is horrible to not succeed”. The next step in this cognition model after intermediate belief will be an automatic thought. An automatic thought are actual words or images that run through a person’s mind and are specific to the situation. Automatic thoughts are considered the most superficial layer of cognition. An example of an automatic thought in this scenario is “I’m in a tough situation, it’s very difficult, I’m not smart or hardworking, I will never graduate college”. Core belief, intermediate belief, and automatic thought are the three components to the cognition conceptualization model. These three components will play a role in emotion and behavior and the therapist needs to work on all three to help the patient.

CBT also proposes that certain life experiences can cement a certain mentality within a patient that will make them susceptible to depression later in their life. The reason why this can happen is because sometimes life can make a person feel negative not only about themselves, but other people as well. Take example a patient who never had a good family support and never had strong relationships with friends and significant others. Due to their early life experiences, they will have a negative belief that they are weak, unlikable, worthless, incompetent, etc. The person will then have a strategy to manage this type of mentality by

avoiding people and keeping some distance by getting close to anyone. Then when a trigger like losing a friend or breaking up with a significant other occurs in that patient's life, he/she automatically will reinforce her negative beliefs on the situation and he/she will fall into the vicious cycle of thoughts, emotions, and feelings that come with depression. This is why the main objective of CBT is to change a person's perspective, however this is difficult to do.

Types of Distorted Thinking

Cognition distortions, which are abnormal thoughts, are very common in depression. A person's idea or understanding of a situation can be inaccurate, twisted, or falsified. There are a number of different types of distorted thinking, but a few are very common. Filtering is the idea of a person focusing on the negative details while ignoring the positive aspects of a situation. The person hones in on the negative aspects of their life and doesn't hold on to the positive experiences, insisting they don't count. Another type of distorted thinking is called overgeneralizing. This is when a person makes a general conclusion based on a single event. The person tends to see single negative events as eternal or concrete. This causes the person to feel like if something bad has happened in their life, they expect it to happen again. Blaming is an additional example of distorted thinking. The person holds other people responsible for the unfortunate events that have happened to them, or the opposite, holding themselves responsible for anything that has gone wrong in their life. There is usually not a logical balanced approach to their thinking, which internally hurts their perspective on the matter. A way the therapist works on these distorted thoughts for the patient is an exercise called mood and thought monitoring exercise. This exercise helps in allowing the patient to be aware of his/her thoughts, emotions, feelings, reactions, and interpretations. The therapist will have a log with 5 main headings: situation, rating emotions from 0-100, automatic thought, alternative(rational) response, and emotion rating after rational response. The goal of this exercise is to get the patient involved and to break down their thinking to show where the problem lies. An example that can be used here is if a patient lost his/her job. So losing his/her job will be the situation that triggered distress in their life. The emotions that will come with this event is sadness, worthlessness, and ashamed, with a score of 80, 85, and 90, respectively. The automatic thought can be "I am ineffective and incompetent". Now the last two steps in this exercise, the alternative rational response and emotions after rational response will help the patient understand their thoughts on an unbiased playing field. An alternative rational response could be "I lost my job due to cut backs and due to the current state of the company to downsize". The emotion rating of sadness, worthlessness, and ashamed can possibly go from 60, 50, and 40 respectively. Due to this exercise, the patient now has the ability to look at their situation in a

more unbiased, objective way, which in turn can help them deal with their thoughts and emotions and bring some type of contentment to their life.

Organization of a Therapy Session

A cognitive behavioral therapy session usually lasts around 45-50 minutes. The therapist will like to meet with the patient once a week for a few weeks, depending on the severity of the situation. The evaluation/assessment session will occur the first couple of times the patient meets the therapist. This meeting is essential because it builds rapport with the patient and gathers a lot of information that the therapist will need to help the patient. In the evaluation/assessment phase, the therapist needs to gather patient demographics, patient's complaints and problems, medical history and psychiatric history, substance abuse, family medical and psychiatry history, developmental history, social history, religious views, etc. It is important to get as much information as possible because the evaluation/assessment phase is the time to decide if cognitive behavior therapy is going to be useful for this patient. Once the decision is made that CBT will be used, goals and a treatment plan will be set for the patient and CBT will be under way.

The first therapy session will have eight main steps during the 45-50 minutes with the patient. These eight steps will be the foundation for typically each therapy session after this, more or less. The first step will be setting the agenda. This is when the therapist will greet the patient and will allow the patient on what specific topic or topics he/she will like to go over today, how he/she has been feeling and what has happened since the evaluation/assessment. Setting the agenda helps in structure of the patients thoughts and the flow of the therapy session. The second step is mood check. Mood check usually involves a couple of paper forms that will analyze and objectively assess the depression. If patients aren't willing to fill out these forms, then the therapist should ask the patient to rate his/her depression from 0-10 on a quantitative scale or describe it on a qualitative scale(mild, moderate, severe) in the past week. Mood check will allow both the therapist and the patient to see the status of the depression and is a good tool to check if it is getting better or worse in the future sessions to come. The third step is obtaining an update. Obtaining an update reiterates any problems that should take precedence that have not been discovered in the first step, setting the agenda. It is a good step to cover your bases and to adhere to a problem that needs more attention than others at the moment. Step 4 is discussing the diagnosis. It is important to talk about the diagnosis because this helps the patient understand the illness that he/she has. In this case, depression is something many people are familiar with but there is a lot of information for the therapist to relay to the patient that will

help them battle this disease. The more the patient knows about it the better off they will be to beat it. Step 5 is problem identification and goal setting. The therapist and the patient usually set a goal list to aid in this process. Some examples could be feeling less worried, spending more time with family and friends, getting back to past hobbies, and improving schoolwork/job skills. Having a goal list helps the patient focus on where they are currently and what it is going to take to get to where they want. Step 6 is educating the patient on the cognitive model. It is crucial that the patient comprehend how their thinking affects their reactions to situations in their life. This is a good time in the session to ask the patient how their thinking affects their mood. Once the patient gives an example to the therapist, the therapist can break it down into three parts: situation, automatic thought, and reaction. The therapist can look at the triad and educate the patient on the reasoning for their automatic thought and reaction. Step 7 is summary of the session and setting homework. The final summary wraps up the main points of the session and reinforces the important aspects the patient should focus on. In addition, the therapist has the opportunity to review what the patient has agreed to do for homework. If the therapist thinks the patient cannot complete the homework at the time, it is recommended to change it to something that will be productive for the patient. The last step or step 8 is feedback. This is the last element in the session and where the patient can express to the therapist his/her thoughts on the session. This is an opportunity for the patient to communicate whatever they feel necessary. Feedback helps with and continues to build rapport between the patient and the therapist.

Summary

Aaron Beck, the founder of CBT discovered a technique that not only helps in depression but numerous mental health illnesses. CBT has been very successful for general anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder and many more mental health disorders. There has even been success for medical conditions that have a psychological component like migraine headaches, cancer, obesity, and hypertension. CBT is a great solution to depression and if supplemented with medication, can show even superior results. Many therapists main goal in CBT is to change the cognitive thinking of a patient. However, each patient is different and respond in their own ways. Some therapists try to start with changing their behavior first because this in turn can affect their mood, which can change the way they think. It is easier to get a patient to do something compared to changing the way they think. There are other therapy forms like psychodynamic, supportive, and dialectical. Sometimes a specific therapy style might not be the best for a patient or even a certain mental illness. However, with the right medical care and careful analysis of the patient and his/her disease and symptoms, a therapy form can be found that is a good fit for the patient and his/her illness.

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Žižek's Ontology

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Known as the most dangerous philosopher of the West, Slavoj Žižek is a reputed professor at New York University and University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. His current philosophical ideas embrace the theories of Marx, Hegel and Lacan. His books, film reviews, talks and speeches all available on YouTube have granted him world fame as he has a natural talent to explain complex philosophical and sociological concepts in a clear, engaging and humorous way.



Slavoj Žižek

Žižek was born and raised in Socialist Slovenia. He graduated from University of Ljubljana in philosophy and sociology and in 1981, he read a PhD on French Structuralism. At that time he wrote a few relevant papers on how to read Marx from a Hegelian perspective. After that he moved to Paris to start a second doctorate in psychoanalysis.

Following the crisis of 2008, the number of visits and google searches with the word “Žižek” has increased exponentially. Many citizens see him as a potential hero that will offer ideas and solutions to the current problems in the Western world.

Žižek's ontology proposes a sociological reaction to the current oppressing capitalistic system. In order to understand his thought, we must first briefly explain some key aspects of the philosophical ideas from Hegel and Lacan.

The key point in Hegel's ontology is that “everything is related to everything”. For him the matter “M” is included in the world M_i in its totality. The first principle of materiality M_1 is already included in the palpable world M_2 . M_i also contains the spirit that existed before the palpable reality or M_2 . However the spirit is contained in nature M_2 , therefore $M_i=M_2$. God (M_3) belongs to a different realm, but after becoming flesh in nature through Jesus of Nazareth

(M2), God will also be contained in nature M2, therefore $M3=M2$. As a result Hegel argues that $M=Mi=M1=M2=M3$ and therefore “everything is related to everything”.

Lacanian ontology proposes formulas for M2 and M3 but not for M1. Once a principle of materiality M1 is annihilated, M_i cannot be conceived either. For Lacan, consciousness is M2 but has no matter M1. Lacan embraces the idealism of consciousness and in that sense consciousness in psychoanalysis has the same nature as the soul. The incoherence in this ontology is the rejection of psychoneurobiology such as the neurotransmitters, the basal ganglia, the electrophysiological signaling (M1), which are needed for consciousness (M2). For Lacan the Big Other (M3) is the symbolic order embedded in the subject but outside of him. The Big Other would include the rules and norms in society introjected by the subject to function in society. The ideology of the Big Other is dependent on the context and the society. Religion, Feminism, Capitalism, Fascism, Communism are examples of Big Other.

Žižek embraces the ontologies of Hegel and Lacan to explain his own. For Žižek, Capitalism as the Big Other (M3) is stable because of its intrusion in the individual's subjectivity (M2) causing psychic traumas and making them unable to understand the necessity for a change. The Capitalistic ideology enters the unconscious of the subject and prevents them for thinking on their own. In that sense, the subject becomes empty and crossed out. The Capitalistic Big Other is the one who thinks for each one of us and tells us what to do: to buy, to consume, to receive debt, to resign, etc. Žižek points out the need for a person (M2) from the Left in the present tense that anticipates the future M3 and the need for a change. This subject becomes a Hegelian hero that can tell the individuals what they really need and want (M3) before they even know it, as in the current tense; they are unable to know what they want because they are crossed out by the Capitalistic Big Other. In this sense, the M3 of the future will be contained in this Hegelian hero (M2) in the present tense. We still don't know how the future M3 will look like, however Žižek invites society to rethink the ideas of Marx and Lenin. Despite acknowledging that Communism in practice has failed, he wonders if the society should once again consider this ideology. His last sentence of his speech at the movement of “Occupy Wall Street” in 2011 reflects well his philosophical approach: “Don't be afraid to want what you desire!”

The criticism to this ontology is that to this date there is no clear political program prepared for this announced post-capitalistic era. Žižek invites us to think about it and to be creative. The Hegelian hero (M2) that contains the future Big Other M3 might be Žižek, himself or may have not yet arrived. This M3 of the future however may embrace the ideas of Karl Marx or the ideology of some current politicians from the Left but this is not clear yet. The risk of relying on the arrival of a new Hegelian hero also carries some risks. A new narcissistic but

charismatic leader, a false Hegelian hero, may take the lead and implant after the revolution against capitalism, a new oppressing totalitarian system, similarly to what happened in Stalinism or the recent situation in Venezuela. As seen in the recent elections in the United States, most of the attention is focused on the decision between supporting one candidate vs. the other candidate. The political ideas of the party (M3) become embedded in the political persona (M2), such as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the recent American elections. Psychologically this may be explained by our difficulty to relate and empathize to an ideology or a political program (M3) without being contained in the form of a human politician (M2). Despite being more inaccurate and less real, the political campaign will be focused on a rivalry between two humans who try to present themselves as the new Hegelian heroes (M2).

A counterpoint to this ontology would be the conceptualization of a utopic society in which each person could make decisions by democratic consensus. However, to state that each individual is able to think on their own what they want and desire, we would need to accept the existence of free will or the soul.

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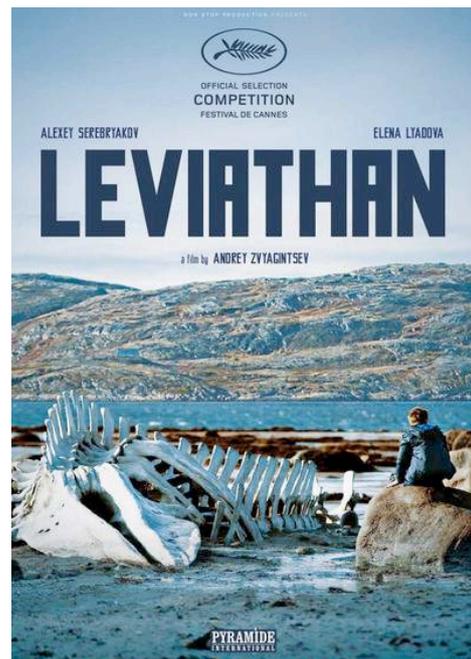
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Cinema and Psychiatry

Leviathan

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The emotion triggered by the tragic story of Kolya and his family as narrated by Russian director Alex Zvyagintsev (2014) is an obvious one: disappointment. I remember myself, when I saw the film at Lincoln Plaza Cinema in New York, leaving the theater disgusted and disappointed by the social injustice portrayed in the film. The story takes place in a rural area of Russia where the town's Mayor has undertaken a legal plot to overtake the house of Kolya, where he lives with his wife and son. With the help of his friend Dima, a successful lawyer from Moscow, Kolya is able to counterattack the Mayor's plans initially. However, the antisocial Mayor will take whatever measures are necessary to carry out his plan. At that moment, Kolya's misfortunes begin to accumulate exponentially leaving the spectator without a break.



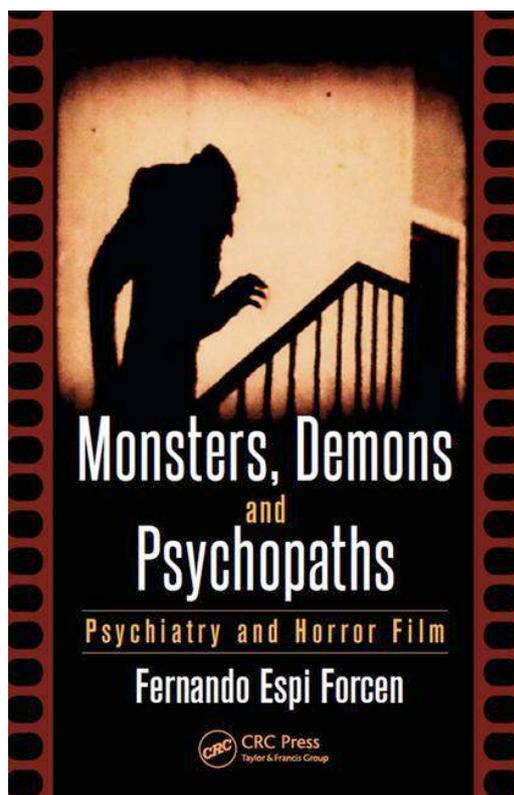
The film portrays how a corrupt system can destroy an innocent family. The movie also disappointed the Russian authorities that criticized the unfair portrayal of Russian people. Leviathan portrays a society in which justice has no meaning. The film however may invite the audience to think about the meaning of justice and fairness perhaps inviting us to fight for it.

Book Reviews

Monsters, Demons And Psychopaths: Psychiatry And Horror Film

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I keep reading, and re-reading this brilliant book. There is so much to love. Fernando Espi Forcen really, truly, loves his subject, horror films, and he is also an eminent psychiatrist--I find the book compulsive, as I can read about some of my favorite films, including *The Shining*, *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Nosferatu*, *Rosemary's Baby*, among others, while getting a truly hands-on, understandable, and accessible psychiatric perspective. Dr Espi Forcen's book is suffused with true passion, as well as addictive dry humor paired with excitement for his twin passions: horror and psychiatry. I never thought that reading medical information could be so much fun. I love Espi Forcen most when he sums up the movies in question in a hilarious matter-of-fact way. Here is an excerpt of Espi Forcen's synopsis of *The Omen*:



"Keith and Robert go to the cemetery where the body of Damien's mother lies. Keith and Robert go to the cemetery, exhume the body and discover that Damien's mother was a jackal. Next to the jackal they find Robert's biological son who was killed at birth so that he could take Damien. After that they realize Damien is the Antichrist coming go the world to start

an evil empire with the help of a group of Satanists. After escaping the attack of a group of Rottweilers they leave the cemetery and fly to Israel to meet with Carl Bugenhagen, an expert on the Antichrist, who advises them to kill Damien in a ritualistic manner. Robert is hesitant but Keith sees no other solution; however, he is killed by falling glass. In the meantime, Mrs. Baylock goes to visit Katherine at the hospital and throws her out of the window. After returning to London, frustrated with the murders, Robert kills Mrs. Baylock and takes Damien to a church to kill him ..." This is followed by a lucid and convincing psychiatric assessment ("Damien's behavior is consistent with a conduct disorder, a psychiatric condition characterized by a behavioral pattern of aggression towards others, breaking of rules, vandalism and truancy ...")

Espi Forcen goes through the entire catalogue of all the best horror films in this fashion, and it's irresistible. I highly recommend this book, not only on its obvious merits as a scientific treatise, but as a compulsive read which will make miss your stop, should you be reading while riding the subway.

Free Text

Camelot Lost

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A brisk autumn midday and a pervasive feeling of optimism greeted students as they crisscrossed the bright campus of the State University System. In the previous two years a new science building had sprung up, an avant-garde art center had begun to attract renowned musicians and artists, and a Nobel Laureate sat in residence in the medical school. With a growing student body and new faculty, this revitalized bastion of higher learning was on an upward trajectory, striving to take its place with the venerable Ivy League schools. A spirit of confidence infused the steps of the students. Little did they and the faculty know that the events of the day would portend a loss of hope for a generation to come.

Morris and Greg hurried across the campus. A Jew and a Greek, different in background and temperament, these first-born sons of immigrants were nonetheless unified in personal ambition and dedication to empirical research. The young scholars were training to become behavioral scientists, aiming for careers as professors—a goal they were confident was well within reach. After all, they were research assistants to a most prominent professor on campus, and their purposeful steps were taking them to complete the final condition of a study that Morris hoped to publish in a scientific research journal.

Twenty-five years later Morris and Greg, both university professors, attended a celebration of their graduate psychology department on the newly established campus of the same State University. The old campus was largely abandoned, its energy of that autumn day left behind. While the new campus was vast and well appointed, it lacked the charm and liveliness of the old one.

The reunion of colleagues was convened by department faculty that somehow had not lived up to the promise of years past. At one point during the reception, attendees were invited to share tales of their experiences as graduate students in the department's castle-like Woodward Hall, conducting maze studies with rats in the vivarium, and interacting with the brilliant professors who nurtured their development as scientists. Greg pondered whether or not to speak. He and Morris had an amazing experience to relate. But they did not rise to tell the tale of their "defense of science" on that fateful autumn day.

Science mattered deeply to Morris and Greg. The study of psychology offered them the promise of understanding human behavior without the superstitions of religion, the banalities of common sense, or the so-called verities of philosophy. Science assured them that its knowledge was based on reality, not past authority. Concerted research on humans would sort out the intricacies and paradoxes of human behavior. Through controlled experiments on mental processes, the results would be analyzed, evaluated, and reported faithfully to the scientific community.

Of paramount importance to the conduct of experiments was the maintenance of pristine conditions so that the variable being studied would appear unambiguously. The invasion of extraneous or unplanned variables could contaminate the study and ruin the results. Such tainted studies were unpublishable. At this point Morris had run two experimental conditions of their current study without mishap. There was but one more study condition that required completion before the results could be tabulated.

The experiment tested the idea that authoritative feedback creates a mindset that affects the judgments people make about ambiguous information. If indefinite statements are followed by affirmation, then responses to later ambiguous statements will tend to be positive; if followed by negation, later statements will be judged as false. Morris's integrity as the source of information was crucial to the outcome of the study.

The study participants grumbled as they entered the auditorium: "Another one of those weird experiments the psych department is running. Look at those nerdy-looking grad students at the podium. They must think they're hot stuff working for Professor Pulaski."

Forms were distributed amid the smirks and snickers of participants, who were instructed to circle what they thought to be the correct True or False answer to a series of 48 ambiguously worded statements. The students' answers would be followed by Morris announcing the "correct" answers from the podium at a brisk pace of 15 seconds per question.

"The students began answering the questions, with Morris calling out the answers. "True." Pause. "False." Pause. "False." Pause.

Midway through the study, there was a commotion in the hall outside. Greg stepped out to investigate while Morris continued to call out responses per study protocol. Greg returned, whispered to Morris, and their eyes met in shocked concern. They had but one thought: "What should we do? If we let this out to the group, the experiment will be ruined."

"Ignore the hubbub. If there's any confirmation of a problem, we'll let you know," Greg lied. "Please continue to respond to the questions."

For the next half hour, Morris continued to call out the answers in a smooth, deliberate manner, and the study proceeded in suspenseful anticipation. Any interruption would contaminate the study. At the completion of the study, a young woman left the room. She returned almost immediately, her face flushed in anger.

“You sons of bitches,” she bawled. “You knew what happened but kept us in the dark to do this stupid experiment.”

The participants turned to her as the blood drained from Morris and Greg’s faces.

“President Kennedy was assassinated!”

Science reigned on the campus, but Camelot lost to the world.

Mollye: On The Divine

Anonymous, 1st century B.T.C. (Before the Technological Crisis)

Introduction:

Mollye is a Neoplatonic dialogue written by an anonymous person involving the character of Fernando. Though most dialogues are thoughts written by the same person. Mollye stands out due to its different narrative and prose. Due to that, though most scholars agree on the authenticity of the dialogue, some academicians have considered Mollye an apocryphal manuscript. In the 21st conference on Neoplatonism of year 123 P.T.C. (Post Technological Crisis) the international committee narrowed Mollye's authorship to three possible writers: Matthew B., Firas N. and Roger O. The last names from authors of those decades were lost during the crisis. Today only the initials are known. The first two were witnesses of the conversation and participants in the dialogue, both were Fernando's contemporaries. In contrast Roger O. was born around 14 years after Fernando's death. He was a professor of philosophy at Yale University and the Editor of The Journal of Humanistic Psychiatry between the years 2089 and 2097 of the Christian era. However, Neoplatonist expert Karl Rogenstein argues that Mollye's author was likely the same person that wrote all the dialogues. He explains the differences in the prose to later modifications during the electronic archeological recovery of the manuscript. The dialogue is set in Chicago during the fall of 2016 of the Christian era. The participants in the conversation are Mollye, Matt, Firas, John and Fernando. Mollye was a secular Jew and a psychoanalyst from Chicago, Matt was a secular Catholic and a psychiatrist, Firas was a psychiatrist who had been raised in the Middle East and John was a secular Protestant and a computer scientist.

THE DIALOGUE

Fernando: A few weeks before Thanksgiving the United States citizenry were digesting the results of the 2016 elections. Some people however managed to stay away from political alarmism and catastrophism and were able to embrace the joys of daily living. As usual in Chicago's fall season the leaves from the trees had begun to die and fall, but not before offering a wide range of beautiful chromatic changes. That night we were leaving a meeting on Lasalle Street and were ready for some food and beer. Nearby there was Café Iberico, a traditional Spanish tapas bar. However the time was already 9:50 PM and the kitchen was about to close and so to was a burger place in the area. Luckily, the Clark Street Ale House was open till late and though they had no kitchen, they offered a great beer selection and free "fresh" and

“unbattered” popcorn. Initially there was a large group of people but the group numbers gradually decreased, as we were getting closer to midnight. Soon after some popcorn, a philosophical conversation started around the recently published issue of the Journal of Humanistic Psychiatry centered on The Divine as it was creating controversies and warm dialogues among some circles in Chicago.

Mollye: Fernando, this week I have been going through some of the manuscripts in your Journal and I wanted to ask you about your thoughts regarding the association between religion and guilt.

Fernando: There may be an explanation if approached from a developmental perspective. Guilt comes from not knowing with absolute certainty that the religious ideas one accepts as a matter of fact are true or not. The person may begin to wonder and to question; therefore guilt comes from the agnostic thoughts that are repressed to the unconscious.

Mollye: In fact Fernando, in psychoanalysis when one questions their own faith, an argument could be made that the person is revisiting his early childhood experiences. The person can go through the same existential crisis they had when they were four.

Fernando: That’s an interesting thought, but also I would add that this type of existential crisis is different in the child and the adult.

Mollye: How come?

Fernando: At that time, Matt and Firas joined the conversation as spectators. Matt brought me an IPA draft beer brewed in Michigan. I first had discovered IPA when I was living in Cleveland and I could fairly say that IPA has changed my relationship with beer ever since. IPA had been, for the last 4 years, my beer of choice. I explained to Matt and Firas what we were about to talk about so that they can follow the conversation. At that time John, who was talking to Stan, another friend on the other side of the table, began paying attention to our dialogue as well. I took a sip of that reddish IPA. I could feel the bitter and citric taste of the fresh beer as they were touching my salivary glands right before the swallow that would send the contents to my stomach. I was invaded by a mixed feeling of excitement, and pleasure as I knew a good conversation was about to happen.

As I was saying, Mollye, when we are born we have no means to understand the existence. The obvious question “What’s going on?” has no answer. That can lead the child to an existential crisis. However, at that time the child is around three to five years old, and therefore their thinking is too concrete to go through a full existential crisis. This might also be a natural way of protecting the child from overwhelming anxiety since they would be lacking tools to cope with that level of anxiety. The child’s thinking is too concrete, and rather than a crisis, the child presents with a curiosity: “What’s going on?” The child might be thinking. “Where do children come from? What happens when you die? When was the beginning? Who started all this?” Congruent with Piaget’s concrete operational stage, the child would swallow

whatever the adult explains in a concrete way. In that sense, the adults may introduce the child to religion. “There is a heaven, where good people go after they die, and there is a hell where bad people go after the die. There is a God who created all this and so on.” This concrete explanation is enough to fulfil the child’s curiosities but at the same time it provokes a new type of anxiety, which is the anxiety of the good and evil dichotomist approach. “Am I good, or am I evil? Will I go to heaven or to hell?” To solve the conflict we need the intervention of the good object, as explained in Kleinian psychology, the good caretaker: “Don’t worry, my child, you are a good boy and you will go to heaven” The approval of the omniscient father or mother, will relieve the anxiety and restore calmness.

Mollye: But the children don’t feel the same kind of guilt that adults do.

Fernando: Exactly, the kids are in a concrete operational stage, therefore, they will take whatever concrete metaphysical and eschatological explanation as a matter of fact. The guilt starts during the adolescence.

Mollye: The time of abstract thinking, the formal operations. At that time the individual will begin questioning the validity of these concrete explanations introjected during early development. A conflict may arise, as whether to embrace these metaphysical and eschatological views or not.

Fernando: Ecco! The conflict will arise and the individual will have to choose between three positions: To embrace a concrete explanation, to reject the concrete explanation or to take an agnostic position. The psychological consequences for each position will vary.

Mollye: How come?

Fernando: The classical guilt will come when the orthodox religious position is taken. The person will struggle at some point to embrace such a concrete explanation for the existence as they continue to understand the complexity of everything else. Therefore the guilt will arise from the doubt.

Mollye: That is why probably all religions emphasize the need to have faith for salvation.

Fernando: Exactly. The doubt will arise sooner or later, and therefore, to protect from it, they will be warned about consequences like lack of salvation or going to hell. The fear of punishment will be strong enough to continue to accept this concrete view.

Mollye: The guilt therefore will be rather neurotic. In that sense, religion will offer a number of rituals, to help with this neurotic ambivalence, such as going to the temple, praying, the mass, the sacraments, etc. in order to unconsciously undo the guilt.

Fernando: That’s a good point. Now, the alternative positions will come with consequences. The atheist position will come with the absolute rejection of the concrete explanation, the anti-religious approach. That would be an easy one, because the “Yes” is just replaced by the “No”. The psychological mechanism behind it is the same as the religious one

but in a negative way. Therefore the atheist also takes a clear position: “There is not”, and this statement also belongs to the realm of belief. With this, an anxiety can appear; the anxiety of “What if”. What if the others hold the truth? In that case, all the intellectual efforts might focus on a continuous rejection of the religious positions, leaving little space for inquiry.

Mollye: And what about the agnostic position?

Fernando: With the agnostic position, the person accepts that these explanations cannot be taken as a matter of fact, but rather than rejecting, the person initiates a journey in the search of other explanations. If one takes a philosophical approach, the person may embrace a continuous and endless search for a “better” truth. For it is important to stay humble, as one understands that in “pure reason” there is no absolute truth, or at least arguments are not empirically verifiable. In the philosophical attitude, as opposed to the sophist attitude, the person must be flexible and open to change their ideas. Now, in the agnostic position a new type of anxiety will arise. In the absence of the absolute truth, the individual will experience a new type of anxiety, an existential anxiety, the anxiety of not knowing and possibly existential loneliness.

Mollye: All those are interesting thoughts but I would argue that the person is more complex than that. Normally we do not take one position only. The same person can take religious, atheist, and agnostic views for different aspects of their cognition and in different moments of their lives.

Fernando: I couldn’t agree more with you Mollye. My approach in that sense is rather simplistic as the human psychology is way more complex than 1 vs. 2 vs. 3.

At that time Firas, who had been listening to the conversation off and on while talking about other stuff with Matt, was about to jump in.

Firas: I agree that you cannot take an absolute truth as a matter of fact. This is like the eternal question about the chicken or the egg. We will never know what comes first.

Fernando: In order to understand that we would need to understand the infinite, something that we can approach mathematically but not so well existentially. It is very difficult to conceptualize an infinite existence without a beginning or without an end.

Mollye: The religious realm would argue that after the nothingness, God created the existence.

Firas: Yes, that’s the Abrahamic approach.

Fernando: Yeah, but, this argument needs the acceptance that God was therefore infinite to create the finite existence. If God is infinite, God always existed, and therefore God belongs to the existence as well. Therefore the existence is infinite. God could not create Himself or Herself because therefore He or She would not be infinite, and even if they were not infinite, the Nothingness would be infinite.

John was about to jump in too. He had been talking to other friends all night, but at that time it was after midnight and most people had left.

John: Hold on, the alternative to the existence is the nothingness. That kind of makes sense to me.

Fernando: The nothingness by definition cannot be, otherwise it would be something, the nothingness. It would not present an alternative to the existence as it would “be”. Heidegger and Hegel explain this much better. The existence is “this”, therefore, “the other of the other”. The nothingness, which is “the other”, cannot “be”.

At that time, I was interrupted by Firas, who moaned an anxiety sigh. I asked if everything was ok.

Matt: Firas is anxious because he has become consciously aware of the inability to understand the infinite.

Fernando: I know, it is very anxiogenic. I wake up myself in the middle of the night sometimes with the same type of anxiety too.

Matt: But what do we do, to relieve this anxiety? Should we try to take back a gnostic position? Would that relieve the anxiety?

Fernando: That would be hard, because once a person takes an agnostic position it is difficult to go back. Nonetheless it is possible as it happens to other people. Sometimes in my opinion, related to life circumstances as a way of coping with suffering, disgrace and existential loneliness.

Mollye: And what can we do in the meantime?

Fernando: I am not sure. Perhaps transcendence might be the path, the feeling that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. That is the whole deal of meaning centered psychotherapy.

I had just finished my third beer and looked at the time in my iPhone to see that it had just turned 2 AM. Luckily, the next day I did not cover the service until the afternoon, so I knew I was going to have some time to recover but perhaps it was time to go home and leave this issue of transcendence as a method to cope with existential anxiety for another day. We all decided to go home, I lived walking distance from the bar and the weather was still good for a nice walk in the Northside of downtown Chicago. That night we left Clark Street Ale House with our stomachs filled with beer and popcorn and our brains filled with new ideas that had agitated our prior metaphysical conceptions and awakened a latent existential anxiety. Nonetheless we left hopeful that transcendence could possibly be a solution to our angsts.

Future Issues

- Winter Issue 2017: Trauma and Hope
- Summer Issue 2017: Technology

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