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THE MORAL DISEASE

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I sense a shift in the definition of the word “science” to mean “the politically safe consensus”.

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That the diagnostic called hysteria has become too politically incorrect to be safely employed, that even those who call themselves psychologists are unwilling or unable to wield the explanatory power of 20th century psychology, is to my eyes only another sign pointing in the same direction: downwards. The study of hysteria was the key to the unfolding of modern psychology: without it, the mechanisms of the unconscious mind might never have been unearthed. Why hysteria precisely? Because it's *so obviously motivated by something unconscious*: because hysteria is the easiest riddle to solve among all the neuroses – that's why Charcot and Freud began with it. Therefore hysteria is also an *embarrassing and inconvenient witness* for those with a great deal to hide, isn't it? To reclose the gaping wound in human vanity with the thread of moral prohibition, to lock away the treasures of vivisectioning knowledge with the sign “forbidden” – it's not the first time. Do you imagine that the stuffy depressed monks of the Middle Ages who dabbled in medicine, who so loved their imaginary worlds and imaginary causes, who entertained elaborate fantasies concerning demons and angels on a regular basis, who saw the world as a battleground between moral agents and thus saw disease as morally conditioned, also managed to accurately assess themselves as *inferior* to the empirical precision of the medical giants, namely Galen and Hippocrates? Or did these sad specimens of degenerative superstition imagine themselves *superior*? Perhaps precisely *because* of their idiotic moral prejudice?

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Oftentimes in the midst of this work, I find myself writing something which makes me immediately laugh out loud – half with grief, half with mad delight: that's my response to vertigo. That so much cognitive distortion is possible on such an unthinkable scale: not only absolutely possible, *absolutely likely* – see the history of religion. One must get used to

the seasickness and the sense of freefall. My job as a Virgil in the midst of this dark wood, is to take you by the hand and make it *poetic*...

How many reasonable, intelligent, and skeptical people feel more mad-deningly alone now than ever before? When this mess began, how many expressed their skepticism and incredulity, only to feel later overwhelmed by a tide of consensus and the threat of expulsion? How many held out against this tide, only to watch their colleagues and respected friends succumb one by one? How many then found themselves doubly isolated and cut off, and in the midst of that loneliness gradually also began to chant the magic chant that would grant them a sense of inclusion? How many in quiet desperation have betrayed their own intellectual conscience and thereby lost respect for themselves? And thereby grown more susceptible to the very hysteria which overwhelmed them? How much therefore has the panic actually created a genuine pandemic? It turns out there *is* a serious self-replicating disease at work: *the moral disease*.

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We must understand that those who are most hysterical about COVID, know very well, albeit unconsciously, that *none of it is real*: this is crucial to the definition of hysteria. Moreover that the deadliness of the virus is unreal, that it is in fact not at all deadly, is *not* an inconvenience for those who benefit from the panic and so obviously enjoy the new opportunities for petty power it brings: *the imaginary seriousness of COVID is one of its most important charms*. Why? Not merely because the hysterical actor feels safer knowing this... although it might help them sleep soundly. There must be a tremendous delight at play for this drama to have held the attention of these extremely distractable and shallow-minded masses for so long. We must examine it as a pseudo-religious phenomenon in order to begin to grasp it: what is the supreme delight of the pious believer, when he persecutes the unbeliever? It's not merely victory. It's the glorious cruelty of seeing the strong and independent made to bow before something which *one does not believe in oneself*: a true priest always knows the idol is hollow, somewhere deep in the recesses of his very dark soul – and *he delights in that fact*. This is a delicious power, which only the habitually weak and wretched can know: to enforce a fiction upon the world, to see the good sense of the brightest and best broken before a falsehood, to see them lose their self-respect, and therefore become even lower than you are, because despite all the hysterics, *you never believed it*. We must

never lose sight of the fact that magical thinking requires both mimicked belief and unshakeable *unbelief*: if you believed wholeheartedly in the magic, you would no longer have a position of power over whatever you had charmed – the sorcerer must *fool* the spirit, including his own. This is also called “the psychology of *as if*” – it is arguably the essence of all social maneuvering. But who among you is ready to see how *commonplace* this sorcery is? Have your alleyways and midnight visions become dark enough yet? Do you require more time to adjust to this twilight, or have you learned to see the faint fugitive outlines of unconscious distortion?

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Most of the intellectual crowd are convinced that less religion in the world leads necessarily to more rationality – but that’s not quite what the evidence says. Seeking to “liberate” the masses from their religion, weakening their faith, and sowing doubt has probably had the opposite effect over the longterm: the irrationality is not eradicated, it is *set loose*.

For most of us freethinkers, something as ugly and pernicious as Christianity can’t die soon enough – but is there another more appreciative point of view, which understands that a religion not only spreads disease, but *contains* it? That a religion draws out the most psychogenically ill elements of a civilization and partially neutralizes it with equally psychogenic powers? That it fights imaginary demons with imaginary angels? That as much as it spreads degeneracy and ensures the continuation and deepening of the civilizing forces which cause these ills to begin with, it also alleviates much of the pain of being civilized and prevents cascading contagion? Religion as a pimple – as a stupa full of pus...

Is that what we miss in modernity? Is this why the masses cry out in psychosomatic agony and have lately invented a “pandemic”? To replace the function of religion: which was not to cure, but to *displace* neurosis into a suitably harmless sphere and redirect the thirst for revenge into an indoctrinated guilt and shame. Do we in fact now greatly miss the *shame* religion used to inspire in those who *should be ashamed*?

There is also another parallel set of factors: half-literacy, one hundredth of an education in science, and the ever-growing influence of the internet. The general population is entirely unequipped to handle the weight of a gradually globalizing culture, the glaring colossus of science, the gaping Mariana Trench of human knowledge, the unprecedented babel of the media, the dizzying whirl of misinformation: this is what the Information Age not only offers, but *threatens* each individual with... And all this on top of an already baffling incongruence of suburban bleakness, depression, disappointment, heartache, crushing debt, and accumulating bad choices alongside absurdly self-important expectations, consumer enticement, and the consolations of narcissism – to expect this stressed and bewildered animal to behave rationally in the face of uncertainty, to be able to discern fact from fiction in a world *largely made of fiction*... Isn't that rather irrational of us?

Why is the time so ripe? Because a critical threshold of illness in our populations has been reached, crossed, and grossly exceeded. Though I don't expect many to be able to afford to agree, this is the fact about the first world: *the chronically ill outnumber the healthy*. Obesity, chronic systemic inflammation, autoimmune disorders, an annihilated microbiome, irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes, multitudinous interdependent addictions, stress and anxiety disorders are some of the more obvious signs – but even among those commonly considered healthy, they generally fall into either the “gymrat” genera with a narrowly hypertrophic range of muscular development alongside a great deal more atrophy than they know, or the hypochondria of the diet-obsessed who see carcinogens everywhere like an exorcist sees demons.

Again the truth is spoken in plain words in plain daylight, with only a single flimsy layer of displacement: everyone now speaks of the year 2020 as a “health crisis”. Indeed we *are* in the midst of a *health crisis*...

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But even given this kind of predominance of illness, it does not necessarily follow that there are just as many hysterical types... The great majority are simply conformists, who do what they are told, who seek the path of least resistance, who give away civic rights willingly because they don't ever look beyond the equations of immediate short-term convenience, because they live in a world where that attitude is not only tolerated but rewarded. The "mass" hysteria of COVID has been a fire largely fed by a minority, and probably even a minority whose constituents shift as the waveform propagates across the population: the prerequisite is that one must feel there's something precious at stake, that a rare power lies within grasp. Who has proven most devoted to the fiction of a pandemic? We have to be brave here and tell the truth: we have to name what these people are without feeling either that one has lost a sense of gentility and good humor, nor stopped short of an accurate description. It's those who find themselves – or put themselves – at the *bottom* of most social hierarchies: people whose obesity is a form of revenge on the rest of the world, middle-aged suburban women whose small ugly faces betray small ugly attitudes, frail and resentful overlooked men with clever minds and busy hands, pedantic bureaucratic tyrants of some forgotten federal office, the kind of prematurely old people who use motorized wheelchairs in public just to inconvenience everyone else – in other words *goblinfolk* of all kinds. And why have they prevailed? Because everyone else tolerates it. Because no one has the courage to say the obvious. Because they've discovered the motherlode of moral justification. Because by flexing this morality they've finally got us by the balls and will not let us go so easily. Because they find willing collaborators everywhere. Because we few brave ones are surrounded by false friends who would rather betray us, and the truth, and *themselves*, than be ostracized. We are surrounded by people who fear a moment of genuine solitude far more than living a lie: the power of morally justified social exclusion cuts through such a fearful crowd like a glowing sword guarding the gates of paradise.

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If the threat of social exclusion drives so much of the hysterical posturing of COVID, why the profound attachment to "lockdowns"? Why do so many seem to love it?

- Official and *moral* justification for one's usual misery, loneliness, and addiction is preferable to the pressure of personal responsibility for social and spiritual failures.
- Internet addiction is so extremely prevalent among many of the most urban and therefore most vocally leftist, that a life of purely *virtual* sociability was almost a reality anyway.
- Seeing the minority of the happy and active world condemned to the same prison of alienation and boredom which one is already acclimated to, is immensely gratifying. Even if that happiness and activity was largely an illusion and a function of social media façade: it's an illusion which generates enormous envy, as it's designed to do.
- All these gratifications are unconscious. Therefore despite the way many quietly miserable people find a lockdown highly rewarding, wallowing in a demonstrative self-pity and a histrionic show of moral sacrifice is not at all precluded, and just yet more sauce for the goose. Moreover the palpable irony of the histrionics of suffering alongside those unconscious pleasures of revenge, seems to add an additionally delicious spice – especially when it's clear that these measures really do hurt those same resented people who previously seemed so untouchably beautiful and strong.

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What is the meaning of the COVID mask? We start with the most obvious signals:

- It signals obedience to the fiction and therefore immunity to blame.
- It fosters an atmosphere of fear and contagion, which can be exploited when personally advantageous.
- It purchases moral authority with humiliating subjection, and therefore seeks to reduce all authority to this formula.

It's widely known that the masks are ineffective. Just as among religious people, it's commonly understood that God does not exist: yet the conviction that he *should* exist may not only live peaceably alongside this latent knowledge in the same human subject for a lifetime, but even gain

strength from this tension. This tension between unintegrated knowledge of a falsehood and the deepening conviction of its necessary affirmation, was once called “faith” – now we prefer to call it “political correctness”. Therefore we must unlearn the bad habit of projecting an unambiguous rational coherence where there is none. Yet we must not be deceived by the outward pretense to stupidity: the human being often employs extremely clever unconscious means of believing something which only has stupidity as a superficial surface, and must therefore have its own purpose.

That the mask is obviously ineffective against a virus which is obviously not dangerous, is essential to the power of the ritual. I’ve heard it called a “talismask”: the riddle of this humiliating “face diaper” cannot be solved without plumbing the depths of the human capacity for magical thinking. As signifier, as *power object*, as a meaningless trifle which nonetheless and *all the more* carries great portent: I find the most explanatory power in the old Freudian analysis of the *fetish* – therefore the reader must suspend that ever popular resistance to Freudian rigor just long enough to gain a morsel of insight...

What is a fetish? It is an object which stands in place of something dangerous enough to be repressed beyond memory, but which must therefore be signified: it serves to restore the undetermined ambivalence of a state in which the repressed content never existed, and yet has the power to exist all the more *as symbol*. Of course the prototypical Freudian case is castration anxiety: that the meaning of any given sexual fetish can be traced back to the question of the possession of a penis should hardly surprise us. But in the case of the COVID mask we discover a new genera of fetish: *a fetish of repressed aggression* – or “castration desire” in the broadest sense.

The mask hides, the mask reveals. The mask denies, the mask confesses. It says, with a chant of tautological circularity:

- The pandemic is real: therefore we wear masks.
- The pandemic is unreal: because we all know the masks do nothing.
- And yet the pandemic is real: because we are all wearing masks.

At this point the definition of “real” begins to come under the sway of the magical: this is the power of ritual. A mass movement eventually needs

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In ethology, there's a concept called "sickness behavior": every decent shepherd knows what it means when an animal won't get up, won't eat, and seems discouraged. There's some speculation that the modern epidemic of depression ultimately derives from this once adaptive behavioral algorithm: to reduce activity in order to facilitate healing. So much of what we see in the shuffling and groaning modern urban population suddenly makes sense: hyperalgesia both physical and emotional, chronic inflammation, pointless anxiety, endless lethargy.

Again the anterior cingulate cortex is implicated: not only is immune response associated with its activation, but in those with a history of depression there is greater activation of this area when exposed to *social exclusion*. This should give us the clue. But what you are unlikely to find in current neurological theory, is how sickness behavior is designed to instigate empathy among tribal animals – in other words, a response of pity to this very old statement: "Don't leave me behind!"

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I hesitate to give neurology any more attention here, because it's important not to encourage the illusion that it carries any kind of fiat power: locating poorly defined behaviors in this or that lump of gray matter does not generally further our understanding by one degree. Only where an interesting cluster of functions suggests something to the intuitive and experienced psychologist is there any use to it. But our neurologists have generally not begun to study psychology – and even if they did, the current state of psychology is so rotted that it wouldn't help: our psychologists have become "social workers" paid to fabricate pseudoscientific confirmations of whatever is most politically correct. *Scientific fraud* is nowhere more rampant than in current psychology: fraud not merely in fabricated results, but in method, in assumptions, in attitude. The moral disease thrives in the social sciences: they chip away at foundational theory with a blend of moral panic and unfounded arrogance, they feel increasingly threatened by insight itself, so that every year they ensure we understand ourselves *less and less*.

But in my last ill-advised foray into the bizarrely dimwitted and brilliant world of neurology, in which the stupidest moral prejudices of the com-

monfolk sit enthroned next to godlike chemical detail and a mastery of electromagnetism, I did manage to find one gem. A certain study conducted with psychopathic inmates, gleefully announces that they found what they were hoping to find: the more psychopathic criminals showed reduced activation in the anterior cingulate cortex when engaged in acquiring dishonest gain. In other words, “psychopathy bad, neuronormative good”. What I find so amusing about this, is that they may have proven my suspicions about this region of the brain: it’s involved in *unconscious lying*, not *conscious lying*. A “psychopathic” criminal has foregone the consequences of social exclusion: thus the honest lie is possible, and thus there is no conflict for the anterior cingulate cortex to resolve. The awareness of this distinction is *verboden* to almost everyone: why? Firstly because the awareness of unconscious thinking is now significantly reduced in scientific circles compared to the early 20th century: most of the loudest actors on this stage are about as convinced that they are *fully conscious* as say, the Puritans of 17th century England were. I believe most neurologists and clinical psychologists today would not understand what the phrase “dishonest lying” means, and believe it to be impossible: only another indication of how far psychology has declined, since the prerequisite is only understanding the function of *repression* and its relationship to what is *forcibly unconscious*. But even more importantly, the ubiquity of this same *dishonest lying* must be kept hidden, locked, and buried: its nearness to moral phenomena threatens not just the whole of social fabric in the abstract, but affects the average quietly miserable conformist in the most personal and urgent way. *Lying to oneself*, and *hiding one’s lies*, and naming one’s lies *good*, are just as urgent now as they perhaps ever have been.

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It’s my perspective that morality is always behavior in relation to a definite witness, but here as elsewhere there are stages of internalization, refinement, and “modernization”. What is it we seek from this witness, when we’re moral? *To prevent abandonment*. To be *more moral* is a kind of insurance against irrelevance. The more one feels threatened by the possibility of abandonment, the more appealing the power of morality becomes. This is why those without sex appeal or social standing often become ranting moralists. It is also why those who have grown accustomed to the mark of abandonment, or abandoned themselves, find more advantage in *immorality*: they have not escaped the binary either.

Compassion is a virtue: we might reluctantly agree. But it is *not the ultimate virtue* and certainly not the essence of all virtue. On the contrary, the *disregard of pain* is one of the finalizing features of virtue. In the ancient sense, virtue is *to act* in the interest of a goal, despite obstacles. To act, not for the sake of reduction of pain, but *despite the pain*. To do what is difficult, to do what others cannot do, to endure and persist. This is all that can be said about such a concept when it is emptied of cultural context: all traditional virtue reflects the interests of a particular people.

If virtue disregards pain, how can compassion be a virtue? Because compassion, viewed through a premodern lens, means *mercy*. Mercy to the ancients meant something like sacrificing a part of one's own gratification for the sake of a weakened but honorable enemy, or simply caring for the elderly and sick: those part of the group requiring special consideration. But no one talked about infinite leniency without justice. Only much, much later did compassion as a passive "feeling state" come to have any value: "healing" as the Buddhists will say, or "love" as the Christians abuse that word.

But to sympathize with a suffering person without limit – any country doctor can tell you: that's a formula for hypochondria. To "feel" the suffering of another: does that really attenuate suffering? We are promised this result. When a child hurts himself, any decent mother learns to limit her compassion: otherwise, *the pain intensifies*. There is no "actual" quanta of suffering involved anywhere: every pain is "psychosomatic" by definition, every pain is perceived pain, every pain responds to the attention it receives. A wound requires tending, a fever requires rest – but also every illness grows worse with prolonged indulgence, every suffering grows worse with libidinal investment, every complaint grows louder with injudicious compassion. "Injudicious compassion": that would imply an order of rank among the virtues, wouldn't it? That would imply that compassion is *not*, could never be, *the ultimate virtue* – wouldn't it?

The commitment to the morality of compassion and the *proclivity to envy*: they are proportionally related. Wherever compassion is practiced

morally, that is forced, that is displayed, that is falsified – it is *projection of suffering*. Where it fails to stick, we see its underbelly: envy.

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Modern morality as perversity, as voyeuristic, as *Schadenfreude*: this sounds too true to be accidental. Isn't there a great deal of "libidinal investment" involved when someone preaches compassion? Don't they seem a little too eager to witness more suffering – to sniff out more suffering? Don't we sense we've entered a steamy back room, stumbled upon a pornography collection, caught someone in the act when they whip out their compassion morality like an exhibitionist?

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We begin to understand what has plagued us for so long: We are *the few who are capable* of authentic compassion, and simultaneously the *few whose strength of instinct makes us a threat* to that same morality. We are the suckers who took it all seriously and at face value.

Why are we a threat? Because strong instincts do not play the game of morality. They are an authority much older and deeper. An intact instinct is incommensurable with morality: this is why there is no sense in the application of moral standards to the other animals – not because they "don't know better", but because they *act better*.

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You will not hear me speak of "egolessness". I have only witnessed one or two specimens I would ever think to call egoless, yet that way of being seemed so severely dependent on denial and *dissociation*, I eventually learned not to envy it – although I could not stop myself from admiring it, as one admires all destruction: from a safe distance.

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How does the code of compassion work in the privileged urban classes?

When a weaker, less interesting, less *invested* person encounters a more passionate, involved, creative individual, this code is invoked for the benefit of the more ordinary type. But there is no *ethic of passion* for the exception. Money-making is possibly the only significant arena where dominion is desired and rewarded, with capitalist aims being not only tolerated but indulged as though with the left hand. The hypocrisy runs deep.

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So what is compassion good for? For children, for the elderly, for the disabled, for the wounded. Anthropologists tell us about the kindness and loyalty nomadic people show within their band: it is and always was within the human extended family that compassion has its proper place. Hunter-gatherer groups like the Aché of Paraguay have been extensively studied in this regard. Cooperative hunting and gathering is the norm, generosity and sharing of resources is commonplace, and the sharing of meat is especially emphasized: in fact, it's forbidden for the hunter to eat his own kill. When said this way, in the context of a small tribe of a few related families, close friends, hunting partners and their children, all our hand-wringing and brow-furrowing over the great moral question of "altruism" becomes more than a little ridiculous, doesn't it?

Notice however, an important and typical factor with people like the Aché: behavior within the tribe is moderated by norms and expectations, while treatment of anyone outside the ethnic identity is not. This is fairly normal at the nomadic level: attitudes toward the "outgroup" ranges anywhere from curiosity, to indifference, to murder, with a preference for the middle. But modern morality is supposed to have shaped us differently? But what do we do on the whole? Precisely the same: sometimes mild curiosity, sometimes murder, mostly indifference.

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When we oppose the morality of compassion, let no one imagine we slander the natural tribal affection that all social creatures feel: dogs in particular model it for us. Goodness, sweetness, tenderness, care for the young: every healthy dog understands instinctively the need to protect and be tolerant towards an infant, a puppy, a testy kitten. What could be

sions – free will, a non-animal nature, a supernatural destiny, and the illusion of soul being some of the most important.

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The moral assuredness found everywhere. Every second person carries around an attitude of complete moral surety: as though they had surveyed all possible ethical positions, comprehended history and human fate, managed a laboratory of moral experiments and reached an irrefutable conclusion – which only *coincidentally* accords with the most fashionable and acceptable and vanity-engorging opinion of their time and place... And we, we who question endlessly, who research, who read, who have put our bodies in uncomfortable places and cultures and been the lonely stranger and the speechless idiot and the beginner and the earnest student again and again – we are supposed to stand there blithely, nodding our heads, allowing another *willfully ignorant* slob in the midst of the Information Age to assert something they have not considered nor researched for two minutes? Because all opinions are valid? Because there is no such thing as earned wisdom? Because their flabby-clammy vanity is as good as our knitted-broken-bone pride?

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The “Dunning-Kruger effect” accounts not only for the palpable *qualitative difference* between intelligence and stupidity, but for the way the gap seems to yawn ever wider as we age: those precious few who *learned how to learn*, continue to; those who were unable to guess at how much they don’t understand, find the necessity of busily hiding their ignorance from themselves much more important than any modest learning they could otherwise accomplish. They learn how *not to learn*: also a formula for success – in fact a much more robust formula and generally the right prescription, albeit the results are predictably predictable.

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We reject cultural relativism. Cultures can and should be judged. With that we take up our place on the blacklist of the liberal left. Meanwhile we reject the bigotry of the conservative right: they are ignorant hateful peas-

ants without the right to judge the value of anything. There is such a thing as beauty, there is such a thing as truth: this is the aesthetic and the code of the beautiful and the true.

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We must look at many ugly things in the course of this inquiry: the issue of hate belongs here. Let's admit it straight away: the only ones I see around me asking these questions tend to be scumbags. Either the conservative pundit type, who have given themselves over to bigotry and become exactly what the left wants to believe is the only alternative, or the sexually frustrated nobody-with-a-name who finds relief in the explicit anonymity of the internet. It is one of my goals to shine a very clear light on this "men's rights" movement, and why it is led by belligerent, lascivious, misogynistic young men of average intelligence at best and perhaps below average experience with women. Why is it only those who feel ready to abandon the right to moral impunity who speak up about what it feels like to be a modern man?

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The egalitarian ideal is brought up whenever convenient, but notably silent in places it would be embarrassing. You tout the equality of all people? But will you honestly stand next to the grocery bagger with Down's syndrome and declare yourself identical in rank and responsibility? Or would your vanity squirm? You might be able to lie your way through the show, but we see that insincere smile, that condescension... Meanwhile, my own preferences for good company lean dramatically away from such actors and actresses, and towards precisely those who are *bad liars* – the company of animals, children under the age of six, and the "differently abled" of all kinds. Emotional coherence and *freedom from internal contradiction* is an entirely different measuring stick – and my innards measure by this standard whether I want to or not. Some of us have been so overexposed to the human capacity for deceit, that we tremble like a dowsing rod every time someone lies – especially when they lie to themselves. My order of rank is not what you may imagine.

Despite that most of what is said here is common knowledge, it is also *forbidden knowledge*. When the doctrine of equality is challenged, what happens? Accusations of the worst bigotry and illiberality follow – vitriolic attack. A floodgate of venom gapes open. “How dare you challenge that openly! Don’t you understand that we all suffer from the sacrifices necessary to perpetuate the distortions of morality? Do you know how much I have suffered? Do you know how deep my commitment to those falsehoods has been? Now you challenge the value of that commitment! Now you tell me my sacrifice has been an error!” And what follows is the projection of the accumulated resentment and frustration: finally a target has been found and a justified rage. “If you deny your responsibility to this shared burden, you also renounce the protection of the community and your right to a good conscience.”

So on we chant together: *credo quia absurdum*.

When we challenge the doctrine of equality in all seriousness and scholarly intent, the hysterical reaction seems to imply that genocide and ethnic cleansing were around the corner. As though with the slightest loosening of the muzzle, the worst of humankind would emerge: this tells you something about what these neurotics know about themselves, and *what they’d do given the chance*.

There is a more nuanced reaction as well: “You cannot touch that lie, because it is too useful in fighting injustice.” We concede that equality as a principle of jurisprudence has been the essential leverage against racism and homophobia, for example. But although our law was forced to see equivalent individuals against the will of the religious and the prejudices of the peasant mind, the doctrine is nonetheless *fundamentally untrue*. Justice wears a blindfold after all. Is it a kind of “holy lie”? Something meant for the campaign speech and perhaps the crystal mind of the ideal judge, should such a person actually exist on earth – but was the principle of equality a *jurist’s discipline* – and as such never meant for the people and their pushy little minds? Is the problem not so much with “equality before the law”, but the gradual expansion of the sense of *democracy*? Some would say the “project of modernity” rises and falls together,

and I cannot reject racism, for example, without also standing by the holy lie of the equality of all people: this is merely an intellectual prejudice we have grown accustomed to. Some of us are healthy enough to abjure stupid tasteless hate without also swallowing the poison of a second falsehood.

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Why is "Judge Judy" so popular? Because we want to see someone, anyone, *punished for their inferiority*. Is "equality before the law" the last word on the subject, or merely the beginning? What does Judge Judy do all day, but find out as quickly as possible which party is *unequal* to the spirit of the law? Isn't what we love about her precisely her ability and delight in uncovering *who lacks ethos* and thus who must be punished for it? Isn't the function of punishment in fact to temporarily *make equal* what is inherently unequal?

We talk all day about "social justice" – but have we asked ourselves what justice means? What's the sole means available to any agent of justice? Is there any meaning to "defending rights" other than *punishing iniquity*?

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When *égalité* is defended as a necessary principle, because *liberté* leaves the door open to atrocities which violate *fraternité* – we see a certain tautology at work. Equality must be upheld because no one is wise or restrained enough to administer justice: the muzzle of an absurd falsehood is needed to keep democracy in check. Without equality, democracy becomes atrocity. Without democracy, equality does not exist.

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Is hate always ugly? It's when ugly people hate, that it really offends. And who is ugly? The mob, the little man, the resentful bigot.

We too have been driven to hatred: we hate the mendacious sanctimonious dogma, we hate the religious morality under new guises, we hate the crowded, ugly modern world. What do we find so tasteless and intol-

erable about modern people? Their impudence, their lack of formality, their lack of honor, their lack of a sense of distance, their *lack of shame*.

And it is this hate, as modeled by my own favorite example in the comedian Bill Hicks, that is not ugly: in fact it is refreshing, it is beautiful, it is “the comedy of pure hate”.

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What I *don't* mean by “rank”: not race, not sex, not class, nor “intelligence quotient”. What is virtue? The ability to command equaled by an ability to obey. He who *obeys himself*. She who *commands herself*. This is where the ability to be truthful comes from: truthfulness is not moral in origin – quite the opposite – it is rooted in the ability to judge oneself more harshly than anyone else might. That was the ancient conception of the ruler, much developed and refined over many millennia. That we are only familiar with aristocracy in its most degenerate and enfeebled form is why we believe it to be discredited once and for all. But I see noble traits in the children all around me: I see judges, I see mediators, I see kings and queens, prophets and oracles. Ten years later: I see confused, seduced, neurotic adolescents speeding towards desperate conformity, desperate moral relevance, desperate remediation of an ever-deepening alienation. Yet *one generation* of education in the old style, in which body and soul are tested and shaped, in which the modern world of shabby compromise is left behind, and we'd have the leaders of the next 1,000 years. But all this assumes the possession of a goal, an image of beauty and nobility – you *cannot educate without a goal* – and we have no more goals. We don't know what to do with humankind, other than put it to bed and administer more sedative.

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We must point out that we aren't the first civilization to pass this way. Ancient Egypt seems to have tread all this ground before. By the time of the New Kingdom, that is about 2,000 years after the rise of the first kingdoms, Egypt had become almost liberal, almost leftist in its policies. As it weakened and waned and grew mellow, even great Egypt opened its coffers to an ever wider set of people: the generosity of an old soul sensing its time has come...

admits that if Wittgenstein is right – and clearly he partly knows he is – then “philosophy is, at best, a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement.” That this is precisely what I think of Russell’s philosophy, can be no mere coincidence.

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Wittgenstein’s term, “language game”, acts as a differential diagnostic: one either feels suddenly naked and in need of a figleaf, as Russell did, or one feels that a light has been turned on in the middle of fumbling about in the dark. But gambling with knowledge is no gift of serpentina. We were never “innocent” in this way and God was never “walking in the garden in the cool of the day”: everyone already knows that language is a game – it is a sin more original than we can imagine, reaching into the depths of the justification of life itself. The differential at work is the degree of investment in *plausible deniability*: how willing are you to examine your motives? How invested are you in the illusion that you are an “agent of truth” – and that this “truth” is not synonymous with the propagation of the instincts whose puppet you are? But if you find yourself rejoicing in the discovery that what’s happening is a game, if you believe this means you’ve been excused from responsibility by our collective guilt, your question runs thusly: what do you think is at stake? Can you understand that you have already bet your life? Can you understand that nothing is both so serious and so playful – that is sacred – as the *sacred game*?

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Reading the later Wittgenstein is to watch a genius be obtuse. His mind is agile and powerful, but his psychological states are self-punitive, obsessive, and cramped. He stumbles over his own intellect: he wants mathematical formalism where he knows there can be none. He wants the perfection of tautological formula to express something *inherently non-tautological*: meaning. He tortures himself about the question of “meaning”. He recognizes that all possible thinking happens in words: so, drawn instinctively to the paradox where he can wound himself most gruesomely, he dedicates himself to discovering the nature of language and meaning, all the while both emphasizing and mourning the fact that he must employ *the object of study as the means and result of the study*. Wittgenstein, the ouroboros.

What's my answer to these questions? Speech is a superficial function of the body. The reality of the body is all possible "meaning". The "meaning" of any given sentence is not to be found within the sentence: to expect it there is to be many times more stupid than one is. For some reason the English are more blockheaded about these questions than anyone. The Cambridge attitude corrupted Wittgenstein and seemed to rob us all of a continental thinker: the way the educated limey uses language is susceptible to such idiotic obtusery – is it the lack of *music* in the British soul? The lack of music in custom, in manner, in speech? The Italian or French mind, for example, has less trouble understanding where meaning lies: *une autre scène*.

What Wittgenstein gets right – and what's remarkable is that the Anglo-American "analytic" school took this as a revelation – is that language cannot be reduced to its representation: the reality of language is the act of speech, not its representation in the words used in any given utterance. It's as if an archaeologist were to believe that the fossils he found constituted the entire organism: audible words, and their redoubled representation later as printed words, are only the more durable vestigial elements of the act of speech, and at most a kind of ghostly parasite. Every actual speech act – including the act of writing – is as much an incalculable confluence of variables as any meteorological phenomenon or thermodynamic system: only statistics and intuition serve us here. In my definition, intuition is the pseudo-statistical deduction practiced by the unconscious mind. In other words, *psychology is guessing*, using as many data points as possible to form an outline of the whole "Gestalt". "Data points" is of course only scientific pidgin for *personal experience*. In the art of psychology, all real training is in learning to relate to oneself: *honesty with oneself* is to the psychologist what the telescope is to the astronomer.

So why is Wittgenstein a useful case study, but not actually a teacher? Because his pain is interesting. Because as penetrating as he was, *he failed to understand himself*, and his failure is beautiful.

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What's so endearing about Wittgenstein? His rare *intellectual honesty*. Where almost no one is honest, Wittgenstein is murderously honest. Despite his limitations and emotional stunting, his imperious and costly *conscience* eventually made him sweet, humble, and even ethical. Reading

Wittgenstein is to watch a mathematician discover for himself, step by painful step, the reality and necessity of the unconscious mind. Russell called his later thought “lazy conclusions” – that language is referential to something never contained within language, that the meaning of any linguistic element is to be found in its use: this is only “lazy” to those for whom philosophy is merely a polite *thought exercise*. When I say that *the body* is the source and terminus of all meaning – that is only lazy if *doing something about it* is out of the question, if *taking philosophy seriously* is out of the question.

How instructive is it, that in 1916 while Russell was busy with ostentatious pacifism, Wittgenstein was earning medals for bravery in the Austrian army? Or that he and Lukács had essentially the same background as children of a much-too-wealthy Jewish family of central Europe, but that Wittgenstein dealt with it by disowning his inheritance rather than take up Marxist posturing? Or that while his Cambridge colleagues continued lecturing as though nothing were amiss in 1940, he felt compelled to silently leave campus to volunteer as a hospital orderly? Yet another example of how someone like Wittgenstein fails to understand himself: what he feels *compelled* to do, he feels no right to discuss. A conscience as punitive and undeceived as his always presents as pure imperative, and as such appears to be entirely *unphilosophical*...

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Look closely at Wittgenstein’s burning eyes. That is the look of a man with an intellectual conscience. That is the violent cruel look of a man capable of *ethics*. That he felt constrained to the questions of linguistics, that he felt he had no right to begin philosophy, until he had grounded it in a mathematically unassailable proposition, that he remained intellectually unable to accept the witness of his body, that therefore he never graduated himself to a *moral critique* – that is a loss I feel every time I read him.

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When I say that “intuition is unconscious deduction”, and when I equate this with the heart of what it means to be a successful psychologist – as opposed to a useless and obfuscating one as is the rule – do you object? Did you expect psychology to be a *conscious enterprise*? A sort of ideal

whitecollar deskjob wherein one applies what one learned in school? I assert that good psychology in real life is something like seeing in the dark, when it is not entirely dark. At low levels of stimulus, the difference between hallucination and perception grows very slim. So while we've long ago reconciled ourselves to incalculable complexity in such systems as weather and ecology, we've been extremely slow to understand psychology as an art of approximation.

Probably because as scientists and pseudo-scientists, we are profoundly uncomfortable with the idea that psychology is the art of *controlled hallucination* – and probably because that leads to another frightening conclusion: that *all perception is well mapped hallucination*. We do not understand our daylight visions as hallucination only because they correspond to reality so well: this is not a contradiction although it may appear so.

What needs to be emphasized again and again, is that the actual practice of psychology has almost nothing at all to do with the empty childish theorizing which gets paraded so frequently through the halls of academia and the stuffy closets of psychoanalysis. What makes for a good psychologist, in practice, is the ability and *the desire to see differently*. It is no passive exercise: passion is required. To advocate for many perspectives, to assign an order of probability, to allow them to coalesce, to prevent conflation. But the main task is to perceive the difference between projection and perception: you must learn *to catch yourself in the act of gratification* – to prevent the choice of a perspective based on the pleasure or relief from pain it brings. Which feelings are perceptive, which are projective? This is the lifelong study.

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The professors of the Anglo-American analytic school are essentially *psychologists who have never devoted a day to the study of psychology*. They are clever logicians, but they're confused about which field they're in – as though a stonemason were to devote himself to ballet. What's even more comical, is that these “philosophers of mind” are considerably *less* psychologically acute than even the average urban bystander. I've learned more about the human condition from a single lively conversation with a New York taxi driver from Uganda than all the forgettable pompous drivel of these esteemed bores put together.