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Fear’s effects on a Society

Fear is one of the most powerful motivators of human behavior and is one that is widely exploited in various situations. For an example, many cultures have used fear to teach valuable lessons to children. Many fairy tales present brutal deaths and punishments, often on characters displaying questionable moral behavior. These tales often served to teach children important values and behavior. Because of the fear, children listen. But on certain occasions, when an intelligent and well considered decision is required, fear may not be the optimal way of making a choice. Among these occasions are those involved in governing a society and planning the future of your nation. William Golding demonstrates this concept in his novel, *Lord of the flies.* When a plane, full of British boys, crashes on a plentiful island away from civilization, all they must do to be rescued is maintain a signal fire and wait. They begin in a peaceful well-ordered tribe but soon run into a mysterious beast. Jack, an older boy, gains power through the fear of the beast despite the boys voting Ralph to be the leader. However, throughout the book, Golding shows how the fear-based leadership of Jack led to the deterioration of the boys’ society, thus demonstrating why decisions based on fear would cripple any society. This idea is firmly established through Golding’s characterization of the boys, as throughout the book, their fear leads to irrational decisions that leave three boys dead and the rest in the rule of a dictator.

The most obvious demonstration of Golding’s view is simply the idea of the beast, a fictional entity who holds immense power over the decisions of the boys because of the fear it induces. The decisions they make from this fear ends up tearing them apart. One meeting, when it is revealed that a little boy saw a dark shadow in the woods at night, the boys’ previously peaceful discussion quickly became chaos. Golding purposefully gives each major character a different view on the matter while maintaining the opinion that there is no beast. The first opinion comes from a fat, but intelligent boy called Piggy. Portrayed as a rational and deliberate thinker, he realizes that there can be no beast on this Island. He appeals to the others saying, “what I mean is that I don’t agree about this here fear. Of course there isn’t nothing to be afraid of the forest. Why – I been there myself”(Golding 83) . Golding presents this idea through the character that is established as the wisest, the one who has had the best ideas. Even further he says directly he doesn’t “agree about this here fear”, an idea echoed by Ralph, the leader of the boys. This immediately marks out fear as an important issue in the book. The Irony here is that Piggy is also the character that is portrayed as the most cowardly, this also causes the boys to easily dismiss his words. His actions do not reflect his words, the fear of the island still affects him as well as the rest of the boys. Another boy, quieter, named Simon “felt a perilous necessity to speak; but to speak in assembly was a terrible thing to him. ‘maybe,’ he said hesitantly, “maybe there is a beast.”( Golding 89). Golding immediately marks this out as another important insight, saying Simon “felt a perilous necessity to speak”. Simon follows up by clarifying that “What I mean is … maybe it’s only us.”. He believes that there is no beast in the physical sense, the beast may be only a part of them. However, the boys immediately laugh off his suggestion. Simon is later shown to be deeply connected with the beast, being both the shadow that the little boy saw and the one to finally realize the truth of the beast, where his original thoughts were proven correct. Although he has a greater understanding of the beast than any other boy on the island, he is never able to share his insight for fear of being laughed at. While these important and insightful opinions are suppressed by various forms of fear, Jack, putting on a show of strength is able to gain influence by saying ““Bollocks to the rules! We’re strong—we hunt! If there’s a beast, we’ll hunt it down! We’ll close in and beat and beat and beat and beat--!”( Golding 91). Jack doesn’t provide any insight on the nature of the beast nor any real ideas on how to act in the face of possible danger. He simply acts confident and so provides to the boys, who are seeking comfort, a sense of security that makes him extremely attractive as a leader. It is noteworthy that Jack doesn’t believe in the beast. In this manner, he is taking the same fundamental stance as piggy while presented in an easily palatable way. So though he doesn’t know the beast as well as Simon, nor is he logical and smart as Piggy, he gains the most credibility. The fear that the boys have for the beast, even knowing that it couldn’t exist, has deeply changed their decisions. It is through this interaction that the first seeds of conflict were sown into the group, with Jack taking a wildly different approach from Piggy and Ralph, and with Simon ignored and laughed at.

Soon, Jack learns to use the fear that holds so much power to his own advantage, causing the boy’s society to collapse. At this point in the book, Golding begins to focus much more on the conflicts between Ralph and Jack. The fact that Jack doesn’t appear to fear the beast is allowing him to speak with more influence. Jack has begun to attempt to wrest power from Ralph, in many occasions expressing his displeasure at ceasing to lead. When the boys go on an expedition to explore the island and look for the beast, Ralph makes a suggestion on the course they should take. Jack immediately becomes angered and “Ralph sighed, sensing the rising antagonism, understanding that this was how Jack felt as soon as he ceased to lead.”(Golding 118). Golding using this scene to demonstrate that Jack’s motives are not for the good of the group, repeatedly stressing the failings of Jack’s leadership. He is unable to take suggestions and only seeks to gain control for himself. Golding also shows that Jack was not defensive before his influence was challenged as he describes it as “rising antagonism”. The only reason that the boys have resigned to following Jack in this situation is the constant threat of the beast and the forest. As soon as the boys leave the area, Jack loses his power. However, this is quickly changed after the exploration returned after mistaking a dead parachutist as the beast. Now with the fear of the beast immersing every aspect of their life, Jack’s offer of protection is beginning to seem stronger than Ralph’s offer of civility and rescue. When Jack completely breaks away from Ralph’s tribe, he forces to boys to choose between them. The fear of the beast was strong enough to convince a sizable portion of boys to his side of the island. There, “Far along the beach, Jack was is standing before a small group of boys. He was looking brilliantly happy.”(Golding 132). The result of this bid for power allows Golding to demonstrate the weight of Jack’s offer. with the fear of the beast heavy on their minds, many boys willingly forsake rescue for the promise of meat and safety. The relationship Jack has with his tribe is even clearer. In stark contrast with Ralph’s democratic leadership, Jack was portrayed to be “standing before a small group of boys”. He is a dictator. The boys are forced to accept this as the fear of the beast is more powerful than their want for a voice. This will prove to be a faulted decision as Jack later becomes even more savage than he is. Eventually, more and more boys join Jack’s tribe with the promise of meat and safety until “Piggy and Ralph, under the threat of the sky, found themselves eager to take a place in this demented but partly secure society. They were glad to touch the brown backs of the fence that hemmed in the terror and made it governable.” (Golding 153). Even Piggy, who was once so rational and civil, now is content to participate in this ritual that he knows is “demented” because it is “partly secure”. Golding once more states, unmistakably clear, that it was terror that drove them to this. Even more, the backs of the boys are likened to a fence, a wall which can be used to separate yourself from the outside and achieve a small bit of protection. It is abundantly clear the boys have fallen a long way from when they first arrived on the island. Golding stresses repeatedly why following Jack is a flawed decision; But with the threat of the imaginary beast, the boys still slowly fall under his control, which they would find difficult to escape from.

As the island deteriorates, the fear of the beast is replaced by a fear of Jack, which allows him to remain in power. It is shown that Jack is a cruel and selfish leader. His followers fear him and what he may do to them. After Simon was mistaken as the beast and killed, Jack leads his tribe onto a peninsula called Castle rock, where they stay. When Golding shows us the state of the now leader of the group, he shows us how “the chief was sitting there, naked to the waist, his face blocked out in white and red.” (Golding 160). He has given up many of the things that separate a civilized person from an uncivilized one. He is naked to the waist, with a painted face, things rarely associated with civilization. He is now simply called “the chief”. This is deliberately done to show us how unhuman Jack has become. The color of his face paint is noteworthy as the colors representative of Nazi Germany. The paint symbolizes his rule and likens it to a fascist regime. Through this, Golding shows how fear of the beast lead to the dissolution of democracy and the institution of a dictatorship. The few boys still not under his control fear him just as much as his followers. While deciding whether to confront Jack, one of them brings up his face paint, “he’ll be painted, “ said Sam, timidly. “you know how he’ll be –” (Golding 171). The language Golding uses brings to the forefront how fear still plays a large role in the decision with words such as timidly. Furthermore, this brings attention to Jack’s face paint as something more than a sign of savagery. Jack is shown to become considerably less human when he covers his face. This is because he no longer needs to fear the judgement of people for his acts. The mask takes the brunt of the judgement. With fear playing a big role in their every decision and Jack being uncontrolled by the crippling effects of fear, Jack is able to gain more and more influence as the remaining boys in Ralph’s tribe are killed or converted. After Ralph’s final defeat by Jack, his supporter’s, Samneric, are captured and Piggy is killed. Ralph himself barely escapes and is forced to hide away. To force Samneric into obedience and punish them for siding with Ralph, Jack allows Roger, a sadistic boy and Jack’s right hand man, to torture Samneric. In response to this “Samneric lay looking up in quiet terror. Roger advanced upon them as one wielding a nameless authority”( Golding 182). The nameless authority here is fear. Golding specifically states that Samneric look up at Roger “in quiet terror”. Following these events Samneric are forced to follow Jack. This shows the reader that it is the fear of being punished that keeps the boys in line. Golding expresses this idea by showing that Samneric follow Jack unwillingly, as they warn Ralph in advance of Jack’s plan to kill him. By silencing opposition in this way, similar to how Simon was silenced by the laughter at the start of the book, Jack is able to maintain power and Ralph’s democracy is finally brought to its knees. Golding shows this scenario in a way that is easily comparable to real life dictatorships. This shutting of their voice is why their terror is described as quiet. Having come to Jack seeking protection from the beast, his followers now find themselves facing a much worse and tangible beast in the form of their leader. Driven by fear they have trapped themselves in their own nightmare. Every decision on the way was motivated by fear.

In his novel, Golding was able to provide an example of how decision’s based on fear are harmful to any society using his fictional tribe of boys. The numerous real-world parallels in his book remind us that the events in *Lord of the Flies* is not only a story but serves as a warning for what may become of succumbing to fear. The boys start out with the simple object of maintaining a signal fire. It is fear of the beast and of each other that becomes their greatest enemy. First their orderly and peaceful tribe is torn apart by fear of a mysterious beast, then it is succeeded by a violent dictatorship. The boys are kept in the dictatorship which they hate, by fear of the repercussions. Along the way fear causes the deaths of Simon and Piggy, two of the most insightful members of the group. As the fear grows, the boys only descend deeper into their illogical behavior. Golding is able to clearly set up a relationship between the fear that the boys had and their fall. The contrast between the start and the end of the book is stark, and the path in between is saturated with decisions based on fear that gradually bring them closer to the end. Many of the decisions in current day are being made out of fear, which makes Golding’s lessons more valuable than ever. In order to preserve our world and our society, we must not be swayed by fear and make decisions well backed and thought out.

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Works Cited

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.* New York: Penguin Group Inc., 1954. Print.