If You Want To Leave Hell, Take The Escalator

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Contemporary Moral Problems

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Table of Contents:

1. Introduction…………………………………………………………………....3

2. Main Section…………………………………………………………………...5

2-a Theoretical Part……………………………………………………………….5

2-b Practical Part………………………………………………………………….17

3. Conclusion………………………………………………………………….. …39

4. References………………………………………………………………………44

Introduction:

In the 21st century we (i.e., humanity) have seen atomic war, two world wars, manufactured human genocides in the hundreds of millions (Mao, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, etc.), have landed on the moon, have restored the tree line at either end of the planet by 30%, have radically reduced world hunger, lived through a viral pandemics (i.e., The Spanish Flew), and currently find ourselves in one more (COVID19). This past century has been unprecedented in many respects with regard to our global technological abilities, cruelty and moral unrighteousness. If one was to measure our modern capabilities from any other point in time other than the past century, one would find us comparable to those capacities attributed to gods. Yet, we are still essentially human, as this most recent pandemic has relentlessly exhibited. However, in the face of what many thought would be the ‘end of our civilization’, we did not descend (for the most part) into anarchy. That is not to say that we acted honorably, failed, behaved immorally or rationally, etc. Rather, we acted intuitively, on the spot, to the best of our ability, ‘as best as humanly possible’. The superstructure of society appears to be our glass ceiling, our ‘Tower of Babel’, where in our effort to touch the sky and achieve our ideal, we either lay another brick, or fall. Though the ebb and flow is perhaps not as stark, Rome was not built in a day, but it did not fall in a day either. We either inch up the tower, or down it, sometimes taking leaps upward, sometimes crumbling to the earth. Yet either end is inevitable, so how is it that from the ground floor, the unrestrained domain, where those qualities of anarchy roll unchecked, are we able to set a foundation and build upwards toward heaven. Why head there, why assume it's ‘better’? What distinguishes ‘better’, how would such a judgment or rather a notion manifest? Why is it that the capacity to uphold a moral superstructure ( e.g., religions, federal law, etc. ) necessitate embracing it’s seemingly conjoined twin ‘social structures’ (e.g., groups, tribes, cultures, societies, nations). Morality in this sense is like a phoenix, in its death it goes up in flames, both destroying and purifying itself, and in its birth is inherently the ideal that which is free to climb to the heavens, yet escapes man’s control. So what is in man’s nature that acts as conduit for such a thing? When I contemplate this, three thoughts come to mind; I once read a passage of Plato’s where he spoke on the nature of man. The principle was, that ‘in order to achieve ourselves, we must exceed what we are’. Camus has an interpretation of the reading of Sisyphus which I find complementary to Plato’s statement. Sisyphus was a king, an ideal amongst men, who was humbled by the gods (natural law). He thus represents the struggle of man to pursue the ideal, as reflected in his punishment (to push a heavy boulder up a hill, and when it gets to the top, it rolls down again, and he must push it for all eternity). This is more accurately the condition of man’s place in nature. We are not meant to rest at the top of the hill, we are not gods; rather, our nature is found in the active acquisition of such a fathomable place, infinitely grasping at heaven, only for it to slip away. When we accept this, when we *understand* and willingly accept that we are fulfilling our essential nature, we simultaneously transcend our suffering, and realize our heaven through attaining spiritual and physical harmony/unity with nature. The last thought that comes to mind is a passage I read by Nietzsche, which more or less states; ‘you can measure a man by how much reality (truth) he can bare’. By my estimate, the totality of reality is comparable to ‘god’ (the totality of truth). We are separated from God by ignorance and death, and in our arrogance attempting to attain his status, we meet the same fate as the workers on the ‘Tower of Babel’, entering into chaos. The capacity for man to while withstanding chaos, hold the line, and sustain the balance between that and order, says something about the essential spirit/grit of man. Our tragedy and triumph however, are found in those who go past the limits of man, drowning in their sea of chaos, or **miraculously** surviving.

Kengir (a labor camp) was a product of a “Tower of Babel” (i.e., the Soviet Union), it was a place that descended into chaos and was separated from hell by just a few centimeters of ice. Somehow, in this icy hell, the prisoners of Kengir staged an uprising and took control of the camp for 40 days. One must keep in mind, that those who survive hell are the damned and the devil, yet somehow, while Kengir was under prisoner control the social hierarchy and moral system that emerged, reflected an a tolerant egalitarian-prestige based hierarchy, which acted civilly and morally upright. In the end, the soviet army massacred the camp. I intend to explore how these individuals navigated themselves within this ring of fire, and how they emerged from that, traversed themselves, and achieved a shortly lived paradise (relative to their former circumstance). In order to understand the emergence of such a social structure, one must first study how social structures (in this case social hierarchies) and morality came to be, then we will know what we are referring to when we say morality and social structure. Only then can we philosophize on the nature of the emerging morality and social structure, in its ebbs and flows. Specifically, those that took place in Kengir, but more generally, further understand the rise and falls of both morality alongside civilization, and perhaps offer assistance in guiding and coordinating out behavior in the societies we find ourselves in today.

Main Section

Theoretical Part:

Early on, humans develop sensitivity to the emotions of others (e.g., babies amongst other infants will burst out crying in response to the cries of one amongst them). This process is called “empathic distress” or “emotional contagion”. This process serves as the foundation for the “ontogenetic basis for cognitively more advanced responses to distress in which the actor understands the other’s situation, distinguishes the other’s distress from his or her own feelings, and acts out of genuine concern for the other’s wellbeing”. There is a general consensus that the development of ‘empathic distress’ marks the emergence of one’s cognitive capacity to distinguish self from other. Following this approach, 65% of the time humans pass the ‘mirror test’ (i.e., self-recognition test), they are at around 18 months of age, which is approximately the same time cognitively mediated empathetic responses are recorded to emerge.(De Waal & Aureli, 1997, p. 322), (Kohda, et al. 2019, p. 2). Based off this indicator of the cognitive sense of self, one can safely presume that this ‘sense of self’ (and other), manifested itself much before the evolution of the human species. Chimpanzees, elephants, dolphins, corvids (Kohda, et al. 2019, p. 2), and wrass fish all fulfill the requirements to pass the mark test (Kohda, et al. 2019, p.11). One can observe ‘emotional contagion’ in voles. When a vole observes another vole in distress, its physiological biomarkers indicate that it enters into an equivalent state of stress as that of the observed vole, though nothing has happened to the observer, it has only through observation become distressed. Additionally, neurologically speaking, the empathetic activity observed in humans is strikingly similar to that observed in voles. (de Waal, & Sherblom, 2018, pp.6, 7).

Another example of complex cognitive systems, which require the advanced navigation of both ‘emotional contagion’ as well as the sense of ‘self and other’, is in the social customs and dynamics in non-human apes, specifically with regard to consolation. Chimpanzee’s engage in post-conflict consolatory behavior with bystanders (non-aggressors), to alleviate stress which they know they caused by the previous incident (De Waal & Aureli, 1997, pp.322, 323). All species who engage in reconciliation appear to follow the general rule that reconciliation aims to restore valuable relationships. Monkeys are no exception to this unspoken custom amongst animals, “all monkey and ape species studied thus far, both in captivity and in the field, exhibit a significant tendency towards reunion as a method to defuse tensions and avoid conflict or continued conflict.” Depending on the species, these reconsiliations/consolations include mouth-to-mouth contact, embracing, sexual contact, etc. (De Waal & Aureli, 1997, p. 317). For example, female apes will mediate fights between males, so that if the males do not reconcile after the fight, a female will essentially bring one of the males to the other and get them together to ‘make-up’. Duval refers to this as an example of ‘community concern’ and ‘altruism’, because the action performed by the female only distantly benefits her and places her at risk. However, she performs this action anyways, to preserve the harmony within the community, which serves the collective good as a harmonious community is a more beneficial community for each individual member. ‘Consolation’ is the measure that is used to measure empathy with very young children, and with chimpanzees. It’s done so by observing how one responds to a distressed individual. Much like people, primates engage in both competitive and cooperative tendencies, however, the tendency to help each other, to engage in empathy, is clearly an ever present factor in the behavior of either species (De Waal & Sherblom, 2018, p.4)**.** If it is agreed that empathy and a need to get along despite interpersonal conflict are essential ingredients of human moral systems, then the evidence above suggests that human moral systems are systems of conflict resolution (De Waal & Aureli, 1997, p.324) that developed long before human kind.

Non-human primates appear to be either guided by or retain a cognitive intuition of ‘fairness’ amongst ‘species-typical expectations’, with respect to the way one’s self and others should be treated, and how resources should be shared. For example, this can be seen in studies where monkeys refuse to participate in activities in exchange for food rewards, *after* their peer received a ‘better’ reward for the same work or no work at all. Socially tolerant species, (e.g., bonobo’s and capuchins) which tend to operate through liberal egalitarianism, have well-developed food sharing and cooperation customs/skills. These tolerant non-human primates appear to measure ‘reward’ in relative terms, comparing their own rewards with those available, and their own efforts with those of others. They actively display dislike for inequality of outcome, which results in negative reactions if such expectations of equal outcome are violated (Brosnan & De Waal, 2003, pp. 227, 298). Chimpanzees, who are considered to be generally socially autocratic, use memory-based, partner-specific exchanges, as well as currency from their biological market (e.g., grooming) to regulate their food sharing, based on a sense of fairness relative to that group’s social customs. They even recognize unusual effort and reward accordingly (Brosnan & De Waal, 2002, p.141). If two apes/monkeys must compete over a particular resource, they actively take into account the value of the resource, the risk of bodily harm to obtain the resource, and the value of their relationship with their competitor. (De Waal & Aureli, 1997, p. 321) We have found that in some non-human primates individuals who receive better rewards worry about the relationship they have with their peer, in that the primate with the ‘better’ reward fears that their peer will become bitter towards them. In order to avoid damaging their relationship with their peer, the former primate will choose to equalize the outcome (i.e., share their better reward). This observed sense of fairness seems to be closely related to our instinct built around envy and jealousy. For example; when young children scream ‘that’s not fair!’ what they usually mean is that they didn’t get something that someone else got. This jealousy or envy is so deeply ingrained in our biology, aside from observing it in children; we can also observe it in dogs and even birds. The envy reaction is in itself a very fundamental reaction, but how one learns to handle that reaction and to move from a situation where someone is envious to where they equalize outcomes, requires a lot of social learning (De Waal, & Sherblom, 2018, pp. 2, 3). Complex cooperative survival skills emerged long before primates; we can observe them in guppies. In guppies, we are also able to see what may be the potential qualities of altruism and fairness. Guppies send an inspector guppy to observe a predator that is close by, to gain information on the state of the predator so that the rest of the school may learn from their reactions. This puts that single guppy at great risk, so they practice “conditional approach” strategy (i.e., an additional group of guppies will volunteer to go out with the scout, to offer additional protection) (Brosnan & De Waal, 2002, p.133). Afterwards, guppies preferred to associate both immediately after the inspection and 4 hours later, with the individual that maintained the closest average position to the inspector, as this is the guppy who was the most cooperative, fair (Brosnan & De Waal, 2002, p.134) and in my opinion, behaved the most honorably.

As previously implied, chimpanzees typically engage in steep linear male dominance hierarchies. However, one should note that egalitarianism has been defined as “a *dominance* hierarchy that is ‘weakly linear and shallow’, ‘a hierarchy attenuated by counter-dominant behaviors’, or ‘subordinates capable of mounting effective alliances to curb the power of dominants.’”. All of which are qualifications that chimpanzees social hierarchies meet (Paoli, et al. 2006, p.121). A study showed two lower ranking males formed a coalition and exacted a coup over the pre-existing alpha, and then shared top ranking status via upholding their alliance, which is extremely unusual as typically the alpha male is challenged by the individual closest to him in rank (Newton-Fisher, 2004, p.86). However, this long term strategy also makes them very hard to depose. Furthermore, there are examples of females occupying top-ranking positions (alpha status) in chimp hierarchies, which offers testament to the power of the egalitarian end of the chimp dominance to egalitarian social status spectrum, providing evidence that chimpanzee are more complex than linear male dominance hierarchies (Paoli, et al. 2006, p.117). Another study showed a coalition of chimpanzees effectively altering the behavior of the then alpha male by having exacted a coup, and then keeping the ex–alpha male from returning to his former position. Additionally, the deposed alpha was an extremely tempestuous male, and by continuing to prevent a ‘tryant’ from retaking power at risk to themselves, the coalition engaged in ‘altruistic punishment’ for the benefit of the group and the new alpha (Rohwer, 2007, pp.809, 810). Altruistic tendencies offer a winning strategy for groups, as a cooperative skillset. “Because a group of two altruists receives a net payoff of 6, and a group composed of a selfish individual and an altruist receives a net payoff of, while a group of two egoists receive no payoff at all. Thus [altruism] can be exploited within groups but nevertheless evolves because groups of altruists do better than groups of exploiters.”. Altruistic punishment is punishment that indirectly benefits others at a cost to the punisher, if one individual punishes another, the individual who punishes incurs a cost by expending time, energy, and perhaps taking on considerable risk, while other members of the group reap the benefits, “by having the undesirable behavior of the punished curtailed or discouraged.” (Rohwer, 2007, pp.803, 804).

It should be noted that chimpanzees offer continued high status for deposed alpha males, so long as they were ‘honorable’ (good) leaders. This suggests communal respect for one’s service as a leader; beyond the immediate imposition of threat or power an active alpha demands (Rohwer, 2007, p.84). If an alpha chimp dies or there is a coup, that chimp hierarchy collapses, allowing for a temporarily non-linear dominance chain. This presents an opportunity to redefine individual status, as certain relationships become less relevant and others become more relevant. Due to this, during non-linear hierarchies, chimpanzees typically divide into five distinct hierarchies and then compete for their place within each stratosphere. Similarly, humans have several economic classes and compete for high and low status within those socio-economic classes. Because of the ambiguous chain of command, higher status males need to maintain high vigilance over each other and over the hierarchical stratospheres, to prevent lower status males from usurping him of his rank (Newton-Fisher, 2004, p.86).

Compared to the often steep hierarchical male oriented dominance hierarchies of the chimpanzees, bonobos are generally much more tolerant and egalitarian based social spheres. They have females that are co-dominant with males, or even slightly more dominant than their male counterparts. Dominance interactions in Bonobos have no correlation to sex, age, body weight or rank, as they belong to a social tolerance based hierarchy, a social hierarchy females appear to be better at navigating (Paoli, et al. 2006, p.116). Bonobos and chimpanzees most likely differ in their hierarchical disciplines due to their different ecological environments. The abundance of food and relative safety of the forest allow bonobos to prioritize group equanimity, whereas the lack of safety and lack of available resources necessitate a more aggressive survival strategy for chimpanzees. De Waal, 1995, P. 20).

Contextual factors shape the emergence of different types of hierarchies in humans as well (when status is grabbed, p. 458) Depending on environmental context (e.g., in conflict with other groups, wartime, competitive markets), adopting a prestige strategy may prove counterproductive as well as damaging to the group as some circumstances demand quick and decisive leadership. Thus dominant leaders are preferred, as they are expected to be able to act decisively and to enforce those decisions through coordinated action. Prestigious leaders show strong concern for the regard of others and the desire for social liking, they avoid behaviors or decisions that are unpopular, even when those behaviors reflect the best course of action for the group (e.g., “laying off employees and streamlining the workforce often brings criticism and conflict, but sometimes those actions are necessary for ensuring the long-term viability of an organization”). However, “when making decisions that are private and thus unknown to subordinates, prestigious leaders make decisions that are in line with their own, initial choices.” (Maner & Case, 2016, p. 40) Therefore,dominance-based hierarchies ruled by tyrants are most stable and tolerated in times of crisis. Once established, however, such tyrants may create conditions and build structures to reinforce their position, making them hard to dispose of (When status is grabbed, p. 459) presumably this is because low-ranking group members are able to rise through the group’s ranks when the hierarchy is unstable, and a dominance hierarchy is most stable/useful during times of crisis (Maner & Case, 2016, p. 17). It is important to note that dominance and prestige are best conceptualized as cognitive and behavioral strategies (i.e., reflect a repertoire of cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behavioral patterns that together produce certain outcomes) deployed in certain situations, and can be used by any individual within a group. They are not types of individuals, or even, necessarily, traits within individuals. (Cheng, et al. 2013, p.106). Dominance based processes increases the prevalence of narcissistic, aggressive, and manipulative egotists in leadership roles, such as company presidents, chief executive officers, kings, emperors, tyrants, and dictators, who have all throughout history exploited their leadership positions for self-benefit at the cost of the group. (Cheng, et al. 2013, p.120). In juxtaposition, evidence for an association between rank and the possession of valuable skills, task ability, intelligence, perceived competence, specialized knowledge, helpfulness, generosity, honesty, responsibility, fairness, and charisma reflect prestige-based processes (Maner & Case, 2016, 10). An example of prestige based societies are WEIRD societies (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic). WEIRD societies often include highly collaborative groups that are composed of individuals who are similar in age, level of educational attainment, are focused on performing a specific task and mostly do not exhibit formalizing positions of power. Consequently, WEIRD societies developed strong norms that may either place a premium on prestige, or sanction dominance, thus muting the relationship that dominance has (Redhead, et al. 2019, p.3).

With regard to human social hierarchies, the model ‘dominance– prestige’ draws on evolutionary theory by taking into account our species’ dual heritage as primates who tend to use coercive dominance, and as cultural beings who heavily rely on shared knowledge. Though ‘dominance’ initially arose in evolutionary history as a result of agonistic contests for material resources and mates among nonhuman species (e.g., chimpanzees), it remains an ever present social strategy in contemporary human societies; largely in the form of psychological intimidation, coercion, and wielded control over costs and benefits. In both “humans and nonhumans, dominance hierarchies are thought to emerge to help maintain patterns of submission directed from subordinates to dominants, thereby minimizing agonistic battles and incurred costs, a process similar to that described by the older ‘conflict’ based account of human hierarchy” (i.e., ritualized agonistic challenges, threats, or attacks resulting in the submission of one party to another). In contrast, prestige refers to social rank that is *granted* (whereas dominance is taken) to individuals who are recognized and respected for their skills, success, or knowledge (which can be acquired via cultural learning or values), a process similar to that described by the modern ‘competence’ based account of human hierarchy ( i.e, an individual’s rank is considered to be a function of the group’s collective consensus on the individual’s social worth via perceived superior expertise and competence in valued domains) (Redhead, et al. 2019, p.4). The major difference between the Dominance– Prestige Account and these prior accounts is that it explicitly argues, on the basis of evolutionary logic, that both strategies coexist and persist in modern humans multidimensionally (Cheng, et al. 2013, p.105). Though dominance provides some initial fitness payoffs, those who are dominant are not necessarily instrumental in social value, in so far as they are typically unwilling or unable to facilitate the accomplishing of a group’s shared goals. “Individuals operating in collaborative groups are more likely to defer to conspecifics through processes of respect and esteem”, group values, customs, social preferences, rather than selfish threat and coercion. “This potential premium placed on respect, skill and esteem in collaborative groups likely emerged alongside humanity’s increased interdependence for subsistence, the increased reliance on social learning and the enhanced need for coordination of collective efforts and leadership.” (Redhead, et al.2019, p.5). A prestige strategy for navigating social hierarchies exists because human cultures awarded deference and respect to individuals who meaningfully contributed to that culture. Until the end of the last ice age (approximately 11,000 BC), human-hunter gatherer societies were almost exclusively prestige-based (Maner & Case, 2016, p. 9) and goods such as meat were shared in a strictly egalitarian fashion, regardless of who was the best hunter (Rohwer, 2007, p.804). Punishments acted as a moral equalizer (they right wrongs), moral education, expressions of moral disapproval, and as deterrents for future immoral actions. Punishment in essence does more than morally condemn; it also aims to change the future actions of the individual being punished (Rohwer, 2007, p.807). “Only once humans developed agricultural societies marked by division of labor, stable differentiation of social roles, and the large-scale accumulation of material resources, did dominance again become a viable strategy for attaining social rank.” (Maner & Case, 2016, pp.9, 10). Larger scale human settlements are rather a recent thing in the development of humans. In small scale migratory societies it is fairly simple to maintain some sort of moral system, because everyone knows everyone, and everyone has a reputation, and so individual customs and preferences are easier to navigate. If one acts badly, very soon everyone will know and you’ll be corrected, via punishment or expulsion, or some other customary method. Moral systems evolved for the in-group, not the out-group. The vehicle that lent us the capacity to navigate through large scale human settlements was is the same capacity that lent us the ability to learn through admiration. That capacity is the ability to develop and procure concepts, and thus to develop a symbolic language, which has the ability to infiltrate cognition and conceptually organize things, categorize things and explain things across time-scape. Our non-human ancestry developed the tendency for fairness, and with this we developed the principle of fairness, all the way on up to religious superstructures. So, we can say that human morality is an extension of our primate natural tendencies, but with some notable differences. (De Waal, & Sherblom, 2018, p.8).

Stoicism in so many ways is reflective of the natural processes resulting in morality and social action listed above. Stoicism is eudaimonistic philosophy (eudaimonia involves the fulfillment or perfection of our distinctly human nature as rational animals.) (Sharpe, 2013, p. 29). The good life for the Stoic is a life lived in harmony (homologia) with nature (physis). And this, given humanities unique, ‘rational capacities’, implies a life lived according to reason; which is achieved by vehicle of using our logos to redirect our animal impulses (Sharpe, 2013, p.30). The Stoics argue that the goal of virtue and its practical pursuit is distinct from the outcome of any of our particular actions. The outcomes or consequences of our actions and plans, are always out of our control, as outcomes lie partly in the hands of others, nature, providence or god (i.e., Zeus). Therefore, what we must concern ourselves with, is our cultivation of a virtuous state so as to be able to “best respond to any and all such circumstances.”. For the Stoics, though we should aim at the preferred external outcomes of the actions we pursue, and do everything in our power to attain them, we should always maintain a reserve towards the outcomes we pursue: “a reserve nourished by a constant, clear- sighted recollection that desired outcomes – however preferable – can never be guaranteed by our agency alone.” “The cognitive faculty and its activities are unimpeded. No matter what might be happening to us, no one and nothing but us can shape our judgment and evaluation of it”, and for this we take full responsibility. The point is that ‘indifferents’, in themselves, can neither contribute to nor impede what we are (Mouroutsou, 2020, p.325). The Stoics insist that the sage is not a “man of stone” but joyful….the former’s (sage) object is the only true good (wisdom), whereas the latter (man of stone) hunts for any preferred indifferents (external means) . By fleeing from all burdensome occupations, one simply needs to “reflect on what he truly possesses, namely, his real self, which is his mind and its power to defeat Fortune, rise above it, and achieve lasting tranquility” (Mouroutsou, 2020, p.323). Thus, the “problems emerge when we prioritize achieving some external outcome over practicing virtue, as if this external were a good necessary to our happiness, so that we become willing to compromise virtue in order to achieve this external outcome.” (Sharpe, 2013, p.35).

According to Aristotle the aim of human life is to achieve/become something worthy of praise (‘epaineton’). That which is good is beautiful, noble, honorable, etc., (i.e., ‘kalon’), and only ‘kalon’ is truly praiseworthy. We are in essence, not the body, but the soul. Virtue (‘aretē’) makes the soul ‘kalon’, the way that health and fitness do for the body; “therefore, the task of a human life is to make one’s soul good and beautiful, by acquiring virtue.” Aristotle’s presupposition here is that human beings “as a natural kind have some kind of role or place to play in nature; that considerations of how we should live depend upon considerations of what we are and how we are constituted; and that human life is reasonably understood as directed toward the achieving of something admirable and indeed even great.”**.** To Aristotle something about human natural purpose is reflective in the active acquisition of becoming the hero, not necessarily in being the hero figure. This is reflective of both dominant and prestigious hierarchies in that one either climbs the hierarchy or emulates the ideal, and by virtue of climbing or emulating realizes/transforms oneself as the ideal/hero. Furthermore something about the pursuit of virtue seems to be reflective of hierarchy. To Aristotle phronēsis (practical wisdom aka philosophy) appears within the soul to be ‘better’ than the other virtues *are* “for the sake of it”, thus there appears to be a hierarchy of virtues. “-- the part of the soul which phronēsis adorns and renders good, the part which has or contains reason” (‘logon echōn’), has another operation besides the use and ordering of goods, and that a different virtue adorns and renders this part in that operation good. This other operation is ‘speculativ’” (theōretikē), that is, it involves doing nothing besides simply ‘seeing’ and admiring the way the world is (‘theōria’), and the virtue which adorns this activity as directed at the entirety of existence, and renders it good, is ‘wisdom’ (sophia).” Aristotle believes that for all intents and purposes ‘theoria’ is the apex virtue, because the objects of ‘sophia’ are not as divine as the objects of ‘theoria’ are. Sight is the activity which most closely is related to the gods, but gods seem not to engage in much else, and we are different to the gods, and so our embodying of this virtue makes us ‘god-like’, but not a god, though still beloved as gods, seemingly by the gods s and certainly by our fellow man, thus rendering is praise worthy. Besides, the activity of simply seeing of itself leads to nothing else and is enjoyed just for its own sake, which is what one expects in a good at the top of a hierarchy of goods (Golob, & Timmermann, Ch. 4). Similar to a hierarchical pyramid, ‘theoria’ is inherently reflective of that which is ‘god-like’, and perhaps represents the ‘god-like’ principle within man, as that which stands atop the pyramid becomes in part other than the pyramid and gains the gift of sight, the view from the top of the mountain. However, a god or hero is different to man, in that the symbol is myth and the man is human. To have sight and navigate this capacity appropriately, one must humble oneself to submit one’s ‘theoria’ to one’s ‘phronesis’, and from this, it is my opinion that the essence of man’s purpose in this sense, is also to actively *become* humbled.

Reflective of Aristotle’s ‘phronesis’, Aristotle looks to Plato’s “Republic I”, to describe how the virtuous man rationally and correctly navigates society, with regard to both body and mind. “Republic I” points out the that authority in human affairs comes from the kind of knowledge or expert skill (technē); that inherently aims at the good of the persons or things said skill acts upon, as well as for a “good other than the good of the person who practices that skill (except incidentally), or of the skill itself (which as a skill is perfect and needs nothing)”. In this case, political authority is also based on expert skill; “their very nature aims at the good of the ruled, not of the ruler.” This is reflective of prestigious based hierarchies. Aristotle then adds that the form of human associations, that all others are naturally adapted to complete and in doing so achieves the ultimate the good (justice), acts as an authority to the polis’s (i.e., political societies) aims. Those aims are to make sure that the citizens are good human beings, and ensure this by “leading them through sound laws and customs to acquire the virtues (and to provide the conditions under which those virtues can find suitable realization)”. Non-virtuous rulers necessarily seek above all something good not as honorable (kalon), but rather as useful (chrēsimon) or pleasant (hēdu), which is therefore a good for themselves, not seeking the good of those they govern. This is reflective of a tyrannical leader who acts in the best interest of himself and is thus corrupt. Furthermore, the polis is by nature composed of households. Free citizens have autonomy of their own lives within their household, but can only freely attend to those actions after having completed their duties toward household life. Similarly, civilians may retain autonomy over their actions within public life (within the confines of the law) and so long as they have completed their duties towards the polis (e.g., such as military service) (Golob & Timmermann, 2014, Ch.4). One’s civil virtue and responsibility to pursue is that of the ‘common good’.

That is why ‘justice’ to Aristotle is the kind of ‘crown’ of the virtues, and inherently reflects its virtuousness, it shines, as it inherently brings attention to the ‘kalon’ of virtue itself: friendship. The kalon serves to reinforce the essence of a human being as one that by nature is a social animal. By nature human beings are fitted to live in political society, thus it is appropriate and ‘kalon’ for an individual to affirm this in his action, and wrongheaded, foolish, and misguided (aischron) for him in effect to deny this in his action. An ‘aischron’ action inherently deserves blame, and, if it cannot be corrected for – as an injustice can be corrected for – it is a standing occasion for shame and disgust felt towards oneself and reproach and repugnance felt by others (Golob & Timmermann, 2014, Ch. 4). Stoics argue, hence, as soon as we regard externals as necessary for this flourishing, we cannot be courageously fearless in the face of external threats of their loss, confiscation or exile. Since the Stoic regards only virtue as good, and knows that with internal caution the good cannot be lost, they contend that the Stoic alone can be consistently courageous, without fear. (Sharpe, 2013, pp.37). The early Stoics developed the theory of appropriation as the foundation of their ethics. They considered pleasure to be only a by-product of maintaining and preserving the natural constitution. Hierocles, offered empirical proofs for the existence of appropriation, starting from an animal’s birth. He based animals’ self-awareness on their perception of their parts and their function as well as on their understanding of the function of their self-defence. The affectionate appropriated in animals is towards their kindred ones, indicating that they are directed towards others from the beginning. Such affectionate appropriation must be further cultivated among rational beings, as to preserve our natural constitution and thus live a good harmonious life. In humans our first ring of perception has our mind at its center and encloses the body and anything used for the sake of the body. The next perceptive ring encloses immediate family, the third more remote family, and so on and so forth until the outermost of the entire human race is reached. Although affection is unequal, we should try to reduce distance and increase affection for our fellow humans as fellow rational beings. (Mouroutsou, 2020 p. 326). To love thyself and by extension, thy neighbor.

The Judeo-Christian philosophy encourages basicvalues, including: respecting human dignity as reflecting the image of God; recognizing the unity of body and soul; the imitation of God and love for neighbor combined with divine sovereignty and human stewardship; the role of healing, respecting the community and autonomy, valuing the family, and promoting justice. (Childress, 2001, p. 485) All of which are rather reflective of both the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies expressed above. However, I would argue that few if an Stoic, Platonic or Aristotelian texts are as skillfully written or as wise as the Jewish story of Cain and Able, with respect to its teaching on the human individual and social condition; “-- And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear….” (Hamilton, 4:1-17). Though there are many takeaways from this text, I only aim to address that which is relevant to dominance and prestigious based hierarchy schematas. The story of Cain and Abel reflects the platonic notion that one’s autonomy is acquired only after natural due diligence is fulfilled. However, that figure who embodies the ideal, who is god-like in fashion and seems to be favored by man and by god alike (Abel), who operates along the lines of a prestigious hierarchy, is not always admired. That it is a very real thing to be envied, that our tendency for jealousy does not always elevate to fairness, but also creates bitterness, resentment and malevolence. Perhaps Abel should have shared his reward with his sibling as apes do, perhaps Cain should not have been enraged by that which he could not control or hope to understand, and thus was inherently immoral due to not following Stoic rational thought. Either way, it seems that when one kills his ideal, kills his god, the loss leads him into the depths of hell.

The death of God occurred when started thinking of him as *our* ideal, we put Him under the ‘will to power’ or in other words, defined Him on our terms as opposed to the biblical theology where the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is addressed on His terms. In the former, we reduce God and worship an image of our own making. The popular understanding of God during Nietzsche’s time was Kantian, where God was only a regulative ideal needed for morality, even if theoretical proof of God’s existence is impossible. Nietzsche did not kill God, he simply announced His death. Nietzsche’suncompromisingly insisted that, if God is dead, morality is dead as well. Nietzsche believed that all morality would become unhinged and requires the “revaluation of all values'', thus we must take morality into our own hands. (Cole , 3). According to Cain, this is something one cannot do, as the mechanisms of the ideal, of god, are beyond our understanding and beyond our control, thus, we are self-condemned to hell.

Nietzsche’s vision of man’s morality is as follows; often those who were of nobility held positions of high socio-political rank and were existentially powerful, thus they are referred to as ‘master’, because a master is one who behaves as they do. Due to the nature of the ‘master subject’ being ‘Good’ is one who takes on life openly and successfully, real-ness or truthfulness are inherent qualities of theirs, “--based on a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health that includes things needed to maintain it, war, adventure, hunting, dancing, jousting and everything else that contains strong, free, happy action…. ‘The noble’, the might’, ‘the masters', and ‘the rulers’....” (Nietzsche, 1994, Article 7), therefore ‘Bad’ to the masters became that which was deceitful by nature, was weak, cowardly, and unintelligent, the sense of ‘Bad’ is defined in opposition to their sense of good. The subject, pertaining to master morality, regards itself as a hunter’s morality, and in the same way that the bird or prey unapologetically hunts, because that is the nature of the bird, masters unapologetically hunt because that's where they derive their feelings of meaningfulness. “There is nothing strange about the fact that lambs bear a grudge towards large birds of prey: but that is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying little lambs.” The master is self sufficient, and self justified in his actions naturally, he sees his truth as one that is constantly actualized by his very being. To masters, their actions are synonymous with the very nature of their being, and that their free will or simply their will, is a consequence of that natural state of being, and is used to actualize how best to hunt, thus their happiness is synonymous with action. The slave morality is compared to that of a little lamb that is being prayed on by the master or the hunter, they are victims, but victims that self-justify, and actually are not victims, but supremely ‘Good’, because they are choosing to be powerless. Their sense of ‘Evil’ is defined as those who hunt them, which is an easy thing to see if your perspective is that of the prey. Slave morality presupposes that we have souls, and that these souls are inherently strong and or weak. They can be strong in nature, due to the inherent quality of their soul, but choose not to be ‘Evil’, out of a supreme sense of morality. To them, their actions are not definitive of their nature, as their nature is a consequence of their soul. Their free will is used to reject ‘life’ or nature, and thus regain autonomy of establishing meaning within their lives. (Nietzsche, 1994, Article 13). Rather than striving for worldly action, the ‘Slave morality’ calls for a detachment that advertises “rest, peace, ‘sabbath’, relaxation of the mind and stretching of the limbs, in short as something passive.” (Nietzsche, 1994, Article 10).

Similarly, amongst the existentialists, there exists a dichotomy of the strong and weak. The existentialists represent a modern philosophical domino effect of Nietzsche’s announcement. Factionalists (a existentialist subgroup that are commonly ridiculed as ‘weak’ by the other existentialist’s) state that they believe in certain symbols because it is practical to do so, because there is self-determined value in the utility of the symbol, and though the symbol is not real, they for practical purposes simply say it is. For example; in the case of god, for the sake of expressing a morality set that one practically and autonomously prescribes to, one would say ‘I believe in god’, though they don’t *really* believe in god (as a literal being). However, the other existentialists make the case that “morality is mythological in the sense of conveying a deep truth despite being literally false. But the truth it conveys—that certain actions and attitudes are useful and prudential—and can be had and maintained without the fiction, without the myth . It is a mark of mental or emotional weakness to rely on the myth. It may suit some people to rely on this myth in that way, but others, like the existentialist, will prefer reality and eschew the myth.” (Irwin, 2015, p.115) The line of logic is as follows, there is a human nature, but it is not fixed or static, rather it is fluid and variable, but does have limits. “Our genes whisper within us, they do not shout. They make suggestions. They do not issue orders.”. The existentialist feels as though it is their responsibility to on their own negotiate with their instincts, thus our essence is flexible and malleable within our biological parameters. “We are terrifyingly free to make these decisions.”. (Irwin, 2015, p.120). Right and wrong are not written in stone, but are rather vaguely inscribed in our DNA. Unlike when one has healthy eyes, and their eyes are open, they are biologically compelled to see, the parameters of right and wrong within our biology are much more variable in their manifestation. Moral taste has been programmed and hemmed in by evolution, as our taste in food has been hemmed in. “Biology sets parameters on moral behavior as it sets parameters on taste. When it comes to food, we’re inclined to like the taste of things that are sweet and fatty” with room for individual variation of preference, no one likes the taste of vomit. The existentialists believe that in this way there is variation amongst the actions one can tolerate; “some people cannot strike another person without feeling incredibly guilty; other people, depending on the circumstances, can strike another person without any guilt; but I would aver that no biologically normal person (i.e., no one with normal brain chemistry and function) can slam a healthy baby against a brick wall without feeling guilty.”(Irwin, 2015, p.122). One’s morality is essentially regulated by one’s fear of self-harm, which can be managed and with training a person can improve on their resistance to their “core morality”. “We cannot count on self-harm to be a good motivator for every person resisting every violation of core morality, but it is enough to keep most of us from doing the most “egregious” things most of the time.” (Irwin, 2015, p.124). The line of ‘responsible’ moral behavior has become individualized and blurred. Right and wrong is as flexible and variable as our capacity to sin, or in Jungian terms, as deep as our shadow may reach (to hell and back). It is as though we left the protection , sustenance and order of our island, because we favored our creation of a boat. However, now that we are out at sea with a limited supply of food, ‘is it okay to cannibalize and drink sea water, and under what circumstances’? ‘What happens when there is a storm, and how will we behave’? We ask these questions because we have invited chaos, and chaos *will* test us. As the Stoics know, we have no control over the consequences and outcomes of our plans….

In Ardent’s work “Politics of Evil”, she discusses her theory of the ambivalence that takes place in the modern occurrence of evil, how this type of evil arises into existence and what its nature is. Contextually, she places on such events such as the Gulag, and Nazism, particular to the 20th century, in comparison to the rest of world history, to emphasize unprecedented evils emerging, a ‘new evil’. Lang goes on to share that when Arendt says “politics of evil”, she implies that totalitarianism is the epitome of evil. It is evil in its most extreme form of evil, which strips evil of its moral context, and embodies it in the very political sense of how a thing simply operates, in that in a totalitarian system, both agents and victims of the system are victims, individuality is totally obliterated, which means that everyone is also the practitioners and perpetrators of such a political device, everyone is responsible. Ardent’s ‘banality of evil’, according to Lang, refers to a type of evil (i.e., totalitarianism) where there are no decisions being made, people operate without judgment, only the illusion of and illusion of such a thing, which is why evil was able to exact itself in ways unprecedented, and therefore considered impossible, by one who may make autonomous decisions. This phenomenon occurs necessarily in a totalitarian government according to Arendt. The point of a totalitarian government is not to rule the people, but to eliminate the individuality from humanity, to make each person (both agents and victims of totalitarianism) superfluous, in such a profound sense that the very nature of their humanity is changed, in that their being is evil by definition. Ultimately, Ardent believed that if politics could result in the greatest evil then they could also result in the greatest good, and the secret to achieving such a thing is an appropriate balance of private and public life. (Lang, 2008). This is an example of the consequences of a post-god (i.e., post Nietzsche’s announcement) attempt at a utopian (i.e., ideal) citizen and society.

Similar to the existentialists, theDauist Master Me`ng, does not believe in god. He argues that human nature is essentially good in that it is sympathetic and kind. For example: to Master Me’ng no human lacks an inner sensitivity that is not responsive to anothers’ sufferings, which generates spontaneously from within sympathetic/empathetic concern. He believes that we are all born with four moral “sprouts'' which reflect human nature, and with the appropriate cultivation of these sprouts, they blossom and by consequence produces harmony in the world, by aligning with nature. (Pfister, 2014, p.3). If a person “is able to develop” these sprouts, then they will advance toward becoming mature virtues; “their growth will be just like a fire that consumes all that is combustible once it is started, and a spring of water that continues to flow once its subterranean source has been tapped, so that the water is made accessible to people on the terrestrial surface.” (Psfister, 2014, p.4). The risk however, is that if a person does not develop these sprouts, even the most basic attitudes and actions necessary for familial harmony (the base of society) will not be realizable. On the other hand, when a person does cultivate these sprouts so that they become the basis for a virtuous and mature life, a person will be a significant social and cultural agent of stability. (Pfister, 2014, p.5). It is unclear how one cultivates their sprouts, but it can be logically inferred by certain parameters expressed in the text that based on mindful interaction with one’s environment, and careful inward attention at the spontaneous rise of these moralities, one retains the intuitive capacity to recognize if a sprout is growing or not, we do not have control over what it becomes, just if we provide it nutrition, and thus we trust that whichever way the sprout grow, will be morally upright and that our instinct will indicate that to be the case.

Practical Part:

**T**he term “gulag” refers to any and all forced-labour camps that existed in the Soviet Union (Remnick, 2017). The Kengir Uprising took place in 1954 in a gulag called Kengir. Kengir was the head gulag within the camp-zone called the Steplag (i.e., ‘special camp’). The Steplag was located just outside of the city of Dzhezkazgan, in the country of Kazakhstan (Sadykov, et al, 2015, p. 500) In the Steplag everyone was given a number and spoke to each other by number. Nicknames or names of any sort were met with violence by the authoritative staff. The clothes given to the inmates were insufficient due to the harsh winters, they would have to tie pieces of tire to their feet for shoes, and they were given around 600 grams of bread a day plus a cup of porridge during labor. Camp officials were given incentives to incite violence. Camps with high security status meant that they would receive extra money and benefits (The Forty Days of Kengir, 2015).

The administration at Kengir was known to be the most brutal. For example, the guards practiced toying with the prisoners, offering them cigarettes after saying stand in attention. If a man moved forward to grab the offered cigarette, they would shoot him. Additionally they were asked to walk in lines aimlessly in the cold and if someone uttered a sound, they would haphazardly shoot at the line, killing and injuring dozens of people and possibly not even the person who uttered (The Forty Days of Kengir, 2015). Living conditions were the worst, the work output was higher than any other camp and the punishments were the most severe. Even when Stalin died in 1953 and laws were passed to more humanely treat the prisoners in the gulags, the administration turned a blind eye. The guard’s “believed that Dzhezkazgan was very far from Moscow and nobody knew about their politics.”, and so they ran Kengir however they liked. Dzhezkazgan is translated to “dig out some iron” (Sadykov, et al, 2015, pp. 499-500,). As one could guess, the main job of those in Kengir was to mine for minerals or other forms of hard labor all day, every day and without days off (Zubarev & Kuzovkin, 2004). As a result of prisoner discontent and loss of hope, when the authorities did not ease the abuse, production by nearly 8000 prisoners at the Steplag slowed. This resulted in the gulag authorities tightening internal regulation. This internal regulation took the form of terrorizing inmates with random shootings as a form of motivation to work (Sadykov, 2014, pp. 1004-1005). This was life at Kengir.

Ordinarily, the specific camp a prisoner was sent to was not related to the crime committed, but rather a reflection of one’s physical health. ‘Special Camps’ were designed for high labour output, if one was healthy, they would be sent to a special camp. However, the health of prisoners at the special camps quickly declined. As a result of the brutal conditions, on average those who lived in the ‘special camps’ ended up in worse health than those who did not (Alexopoulos, 2017, pp. 204-205). The gulag leadership was more interested in work output than in lives and their solution to the weakening population was to take away their resources (i.e., food and water, etc.) to supplement the strong. The prison authority labeled the weak and sick as ‘saboteurs’ of the efficient economic production to justify on paper their systematic starvation of people. (Alexopoulos, 2017, pp. 188-189). The year after Stalin died, many gulags would engage in hunger strikes in response to the abuse. All the inmates that were involved in these different hunger strikes were then transferred to Kengir (Graziosi, 1992, p. 429).

The population of the Steplag in 1954 consisted of “2,660 Russians, 9,596 Ukrainians, 2,690 Lithuanians, 1,074 Latvians, 290 Kazakhs” (Sadykov, 2014, p. 1006), as well as small populations of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and other minorities. (Sadykov, et al, 2015, p. 502). After WWII Soviet Russia annexed large areas of land from surrounding nations. As a result, the Soviet Union sent a large number of anti-Soviet nationalist to the gulags. (Van Ree, 2013, p.3). Kengir camp held 5,392 prisoners, 72 percent of whom had participated in either Ukranian or Baltic nationalist organizations (Barnes, 2005, p. 829). 43 percent of the Kengir population were women (Barnes, 2011, p. 214). Of the Russian population in Kengir, most of them had belonged to the Russian military (Martin & Varney, 2003, p. 226). During Stalin’s reign the practice was that failure in battle would result in punishment. This concept officially became law in Article 58. Article 58 stated, amongst many things that if anyone, including a soldier did anything to undermine the security, economic, political or national quest of the Soviet Union, they would be punished severely. For example, if soldiers retreated in a hasty fashion they were to be imprisoned or shot, their property confiscated and their families would be banished to labor towns in Siberia (Hogan, 1955, pp. 410, 411, 412). Kengir was almost exclusively filled with political prisoners. A political prisoner ranged from people with familial ties to the former or opposing government(s) of the Soviet regime to anyone who complained about the Soviet regime or simply belonged to the middle or wealthy class (including farmers) (The Forty Days of Kengir, 2015). To be a political prisoner was to be part of a ‘social category’. A ‘social category’ is a collection of people that have specific traits or characteristics in common, but are motley as they typically do not interact with one another.

The systematic oppression and disarray of the Soviet Union in the years following the death of Stalin coupled with the corruption and abuse found in the ‘special camps’ birthed the many factors that would contribute to this uprising. In March 1953 Joseph Stalin died, leaving special camp prisoners with high hopes for some sort of relief of their conditions and sentencing. Stalin’s heirs moved to ‘restore’ ‘social justice’, originally starting with the Article 58 amnesty provision, which was popularized as the amnesty to provide justice to wrongly convicted prisoners (Elie & Hardy, 2015, p. 582). Article 58 freed individuals that were 18 and younger, or those who had lost their health, as well as those who had been convicted only up to 5 years, while those non-political prisoners (e.g., thieves and violent criminals) with sentences in excess of 5 years, their sentences were cut in half. From the Steplag, only 62 prisoners were released. (Sadykov, 2014, p. 1004). Unfortunately, the Article 58 amnesty did not apply to the majority of special camp prisoners, leaving the prison population extremely agitated (Barnes, 2011, p. 213). The special camp prisoners were severely abused, terrorized and forced to engage in ‘dehumanizing’ practices such as refer to each other by number.

Additionally, after Stalin’s death there was a breakdown of authority at the camps. His legend left a vacuum that none of his immediate successors could fill. Their rule was seen as synthetic charisma and created a sense of instability and disorganization throughout the entire government (Bociurkiw, 1960, pp. 578-579). Amongst the guards it was felt that the system they were placed in was crumbling around them. Despite strict protocols and prohibition of certain actions, guards themselves stopped following rules. Ultimately, guards began to behave autonomously and were attempting to wait out the inevitable collapse of the Soviet system (Graziosi, 1992, p. 431). Both criminals and guards came from the same Soviet working class, shared the same discontent with the Soviet system run by the elite which oppressed the working class. Additionally the soviet guards and criminals had to endure the same privations at camp, sang the same songs, and used the same slang. Their similarities could be best seen from a short distance, where one could not tell the difference from the other, due to how worn down the guards where in terms of both physical health and the quality of their clothes (Brown, 2012, p. 949) The only thing separating them from the prisoners were that they carried guns and a faraway government said they were in charge. As the authority’s control over the camps diminished – a situation exacerbated by a severe shortage of armed guards – acts of mass disobedience, escapes and mass refusals to work occurred more frequently.” (Barnes, 2011, pp. 202-203). With the role of authority collapsing around them, random murders openly committed by said authority and the disappointment caused by the failure of the new government to act justly, the prisoners at Kengir were on the verge of a major riot. The straw that broke the camel’s back was when the authority attempted to smother out the minor riots by pouring violent criminals into the facility (Alexanderyakovlev, 2016). The prison staff attempted an intervention to put an end to the minor riots. Seeing a major riot on the horizon, they introduced 600 violent criminals to the gulag with the belief that the criminals “would resume their terrorization of the politicals and dampen their spirits”, which would lead to a lack of ‘group cohesion’. However the criminals ended up joining the political prisoners and served to severely radicalize the camp (Barnes, 2005, p. 830), (Alexanderyakovlev, 2016). As a result, Kengir had an army.

The Kengir Uprising began on May 16, 1954. Around 60 prisoners scaled the internal fences of the camp and managed to enter other quarters in an attempt to be able to openly communicate with other inmates. After several violent and verbal exchanges with the guards, on May 17th 400 prisoners began to riot, breaking the fences between zones. The guards attempted to interrupt the riot by urging the men to return back to their zone. At first they stated that if they returned to their zones there would be no punishment, but soon they started threatening them. On the 18th guards opened suppressive automatic fire, killing nearly 20 people and injuring 70. This enraged the crowd who soon took over the entire camp, and expelled the guards from the facility (Zubarev & Kuzovkin, 2004). The physical facility was in the shape of a rectangle with four smaller rectangles spaced along its width, three for inmates and one as a service yard. The inmates scaled the walls, took out the lights and barricaded the doors of these rectangles one by one. The only place the guards could escape to once they lost control of the facility was to the perimeter walls (alexanderyakovlev, 2016). On the 18th an ex-Soviet General named Kuznetsov was freed. He immediately took control of the rebellion, restricting the protest and setting a time and place for negotiations with officials (Zubarev & Kuzovkin, 2004). After the prisoners took control of the camp and Kuznetsov organized the group, the camp transformed itself into a miniature independent republic with a head commission of twelve, who met privately and under heavy security (Graziosi, 1992, p. 438). This “quasi government” allocated people into working branches including military, internal security, nutrition, household, medical services, and propaganda departments, etc. A special department was even developed to manufacture weapons, including even making a minefield and make-shift grenades (Zubarev & Kuzovkin, 2004). Prisoners who were not in support of the uprising, were imprisoned. (Barnes, 2011, pp. 215-216). Though one would expect a prison occupation to be violent, Kengir was not filled with violent prisoners. In fact the Kengir occupation was very civil. During the 40 day occupation of the prison there were prisoner marriages, religious ceremonies took place (which could not have happened outside of prison), art shows, theatrical performances and small music symphonies were held. Additionally, they provided equal food rations to everyone, from the head of the leadership to the ill (The Forty Days of Kengir, 2015). This ‘group cohesion’ or overpowering sense of “we-ness” would not have been possible had the prisoners not rioted and then held their ground together. Their collective rioting was an example of ‘combat socialization’, where people formally with no reason to trust each other, engaged in a dangerous act together as a group to build said trust. Kuznetsov’s immediate rise to power is a good example of ‘identification’, as both the national authority and rioters were easily influenced by the famous ex-generals status and command. Another dynamic that took place here was ‘in-group vs. out-group, which consisted of inmates vs. guards. ‘In-group’ is defined as a social group that a person(s) psychologically identifies with as being a member of, and an ‘out-group’ is a group consisting of people who do not psychologically identify with the in-group. Additionally, there were group ‘norms’ despite the diversity of the crowd in Kengir. There were unwritten, but understood rules of society and culture for the behaviors that were considered acceptable. Furthermore, the allocated work force set by the improvised government is an example of ‘Social Influence Theory’, where due to the social climate inmates changed their behavior to total compliance with said commands and instructions. It is clear that there was a strong ‘collective culture’ as participants were more than willing to pursue any avenue of work for the greater good of the internal community -- going as far as to create art shows and musical performances for everyone to enjoy, regardless of creed or nationality. This also suggests a strong group ‘cohesiveness’ as the group actively took special care to behave civil and secure everyone’s wellbeing, including taking care of the sick and providing equal rations to all, regardless of health. I would also say that there was a sense of ‘authority orientation’, as it is clear that people did not act ‘out of line’, but rather believed that their civil behavior served an important purpose.

A critical decision made by Kuznetsov was his choice of propaganda and negotiation tactics. Unlike the other riots that had occurred in other gulags, Kuznetsov presented his force as having unwavering faith in the Soviet party and expressed that he had only lost faith in the local authorities who were corrupted, inviting those higher in the governmental chain of command to conduct investigations into how the guards had not followed the humanitarian bill. “The prisoners were not resisting against the party; they were resisting in the name of the party” (Barnes, 2005, p. 841). The Kengir Uprising was meant to exhibit dissidence, not a protest for national liberation (Kundakbayeva & Kassymova, 2016, p. 9). This maneuver both stunted the guard’s willingness to call for military support, and bought the camp more time, while the higher-ups would have to figure out how to address the unprecedented situation (Graziosi, 1992, p. 431). In an attempt to defuse the uprising, midway through it, officials from Moscow offered Kuznetsov his release, “he did not leave his friends, rather, he stayed with them until the end” (Sadykov, et al, 2015, p. 501).

During the riot, the prisoners engaged with the local military in a propaganda war. The prisoners hoisted banners, dropped fliers from kites and air balloons, and would send messages through a make-shift radio, reporting what was happening in the hopes someone would give the unfiltered report of events to Moscow officials, which included their demands (Brown, 2009, p. 949). Their demands included punishment of the guards who killed the prisoners indiscriminately and unjustly. “Punish those who beat up women, no more number patches…”, an eight-hour work day, unrestricted correspondence with relatives and a review of cases. (alexanderyakovlev, 2016). In response, the guards attempted to intervene by seeking to barter with the subgroups of the rebellion in an attempt to break the prisoners’ unity and incite internal corruption (Barnes, 2005, p. 833).

When the authorities realized that the prisoners could not be persuaded, they decided to intervene with a full military strike amassing a military force of 1,600 military guards, a division of international security, 98 specially trained officers paired with dogs, three fire trucks, five t-34 armored vehicles (tanks), and more (Goble, 2017). At 3:28 am on June 26, 1954, the military authority, who now surrounded the perimeter of the gulag with military back-up and broadcasted a message to the inmates over the radio. The authority broadcasted that it was going to lead troops into the camp zone at 3:30 am and destroy their barricades. Prisoners were to stay in their barracks until camp administration spoke to them in person. Those who would not be in the barracks would need to lay their arms down and allow themselves to be detained. Anyone who did not comply would be subject to gunfire (Yakovlev, 2016). As promised at 3:30 am, the authorities attacked, however they shot rockets into the buildings with people in them, ran over the populated barracks with tanks, and dropped bombs from jets, amongst other things. Though the rioters attacked as best they could, they were no match (Zubarev & Kuzovkin, 2004). It was a massacre; 600-700 people were killed. Hundreds of Ukrainian women held hands and stood in front of tanks, but the tanks did not stop. A couple, the man’s name Semen Rak, threw themselves holding hands underneath a tank in hopes of stopping the tank, a man named Alphonsas Urbanas, was pushed out of the way of a tank by another women “at the cost of her own life”. (Goble, 2017). The official reason for the military attack was that the army was acting to rescue hostage citizens, claiming that the majority of prisoners requested that they return to normal conditions with regard to life and work and that they be liberated from the armed criminals (Yakovlev, 2016). To qualify this, the guards placed weapons beside fallen prisoners and took photographs as evidence, making sure to leave their own forces out of the frame. (Solzhenitsyn, 2007, p. 328). I believe that the occupying force of the gulag experienced a form of ‘escalating commitments’, facing certain death, many of the prisoners felt that it was too late to back down and rather than save themselves in mass, chose to continue and engage in battle, leading to their massacre.

The way Kengir was being run is reflective of a non-linear male dominance hierarchy, seen in apes. Such hierarchies are enforced through fear, coercion and a monopoly of resources by those who claim high status. Reflective of said hierarchy types, those who survived were also the individuals who were literally the fittest. Additionally, another survival method was met by forming relationships with those in charge. The majority of the prisoner population in Kengir, where people of a common cause (i.e., belonging to either the Ukrainian or Baltic Nationalist organizations). Therefore, they retained a common network of norms and principles amongst one another, even though both the guards and prisoners were of common class and culture. However, the prisoners by virtue of either being a political prisoner, a benefactor (Kulak) of the previous monarchy (prior to Soviet Russia), or related to the former aristocracy, in mass had experience in competence/prestige based hierarchies types. Additionally, many having been soldiers and survivors of the Soviet system, they also knew how to navigate dominance based hierarchies. The guards on the other hand, strictly behaved along the parameters of a classic male dominance hierarchy. Evolution has shown us what the potential of either hierarchy types brings us. Eventually, the prisoners of Kengir behaved altruistically, and at risk to their wellbeing, formed a massive coalition and overtook the camp to rid themselves of their tyrannical leadership. A former Alpha who retained respect and status due to his honorable display at performing his former job, former Soviet General Kuzntsov, was selected by the group to be their leader. As is expected of prestigious leaders, rather than seizing power, he created a board of leaders, forming a Republic. Each leader, who was selected by their prestige in a particular field, had their own responsibilities with respect to particular leadership in the Republic. This distribution of power amongst co-dominant leadership is reflective an egalitarian based leadership style. By keeping secrecy with regard to their plans, but listening to the people democratically, the heads of staff were able to act dynamically, while also fulfilling the needs of the group at large in a fair fashion (i.e., aiming to serve the group in the best interest of the group). A similar leadership model can be seen today in Switzerland. The leadership enforced altruistic punishment unto those who refused to take on their duty as member of the community. In both dominance and prestige based models, this is a sign of good leadership. As is the nature of complex prestigious groups, the Republic of Kengir’s civilian population was able to foster a complex cultural structure, signified by their encouragement to engage in the arts, as well allowing for an open practicing of religion(s). The presence of the military (a threatening out-group) only made the in-group ‘group cohesion’ stronger and thus that much more dedicated, as was seen by those who sacrificing their lives for others during the final massacre. When listing their demands to the Soviet government, they requested only that their essential needs be met and just punishments be delivered to those guards who behaved unfairly, relative to Soviet law. Similar desires are seen in non-human primates who belong to tolerant-egalitarian societies, who demand a fair allocation of resources. The group in mass seemed to have evaluated their values and when compared to the bare minimum of their social norms decided to depose their leadership in exchange for a prestige based leadership. In the end, similar to bonobo’s fighting over territory, another community (the Soviet army) engaged the Kengir Republic in battle for the control of the prison, and beat them.

In relation to the principles encouraged in stoicism, the people of Kengir rose above their external privations, under both hierarchy types, and internally dictated their wellbeing. This was expressed, for example, by their willingness to engage in hunger strikes regardless of already being starved and tormented. By Aristotelian and Platonic sentiment’s, with regard to virtuous action within society, those who participated in the Republic of Kengir valued individuals who possessed skillsets that would enrich the community. Jointly, they also valued those who took action to do so regardless of the quality of their skill, so far as they engaged in their civil duties before enjoying their autonomy. It is clear that their upmost value was to reflect ideal behavior and thus reflect the ‘heroic figure’, as is evident from nearly every action they took, being noble in nature, as well as operating within a prestige based society. Their sense of ‘justice’ outweighed any corrupt pursuits of personal pleasures, and they engaged in strict egalitarian disciplines placing their friends before themselves, never leaving the other in battle. The guards on the other hand, who acted in opposition to the national law, to reap financial personal benefit, acted both corruptly and immorally, thus representing poor political leadership. The Soviet Union, who chose to destroy those who were virtuous, honest, and good, rather than cultivating these qualities in their people reflected bad political leadership as well. The Republic of Kengir acted courageously, without fear of loss, as they had no *thing* to lose. Their demands were not to end their confinement, but rather to be treated fairly in accordance with the law, remaining loyal to the state, and simply demanded an end of the guard’s unmitigated corruption. In line with the Judea-Christian morality, those citizens of the Republic of Kengir loved their neighbors as they loved themselves, and did not violate the cardinal laws within their societies, and only did so to the out-group inorder to survive (on a minimal basis). In juxtaposition, the guards of Kengir chose to rejected their ideal (i.e., by ignoring the command of the Soviet Union), and as a consequence, raised hell. In line with both Nietzsches ‘death of god’ and Anna Ardent’s “Politics of Evil”, the Soviet regime who rejected God, attempted to reconstruct a society and morality independent of the ancient superstructures of religion, and descended into hell. As seen, by the gaurds of Kengir who had been molded by the totalitarian regime, the devilish morality that could be expected to arise in realtion to the philosophy of Existentialism was actualized. The guards were ‘trained’ to ignore their core moral fear and engage on whim and other self-constructed motives. With respect to Nietzsche’s ‘master and slave’ moral proposition, it appears that both the Republic of Kengir and the Soviet Union acted primarily using master morality, taking when they desired from life, bravely. However, the Republic of Kengir coordinated the election of officials which is not as dominant as expected by leaders who engage in master morality, and wanes towards slave morality. Furthermore the Soviet Union acted resentfully towards the Republic’s occupants, which is also slave like. Lastly, with respect to the Dauist philosophy presented above, one can make two arguments. The first being that the citizens of the Soviet Union as a whole did not cultivate their sprouts, and thus the society as a whole was corrupted, which is suggested (in other terms) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his trilogy “The Gulag Archipelago”. The second argument would be that simply not enough people cultivated their sprouts in the Soviet society. In the case of the occupants of Kengir, these people having in part been previously successful had some experience in cultivating their sprouts, but their society was too corrupt. Yet, when given their own opportunity to form a society; were able to further cultivate their sprouts and this allowed for the blossoming of their beautiful micro-society.

Conclusion:

So how did the prison population of Kengir emerge morally upright amidst a hell, a ruined society? When looking at the origin of that which is morally upright, we must study the emergence of morality and by necessity the emergence of social structure. For example when observing non-human primates, we see that this begins by a group of primates determining that cooperation is adventitious for one another (though mutually beneficial cooperation is older than apes, we will use apes as an example). However, a group of primates only want to work together if they behave appropriately (fairly), otherwise it is not as adventitious to work together if one party is being taken advantage of, and so the aim becomes to behave fairly. Apes then develop customs and preferences for one another, learning what each other needs and wants. By serving the needs and wants of others, others supply them with their own needs and wants in turn. This group then further expands, and becomes a ‘tribe’ (i.e., small community). By environmental necessity and by virtue of collective navigation, a social hierarchy emerges naturally (e.g., infants bellow mothers, etc.). Eventually, as the customs and preferences of the tribe become normative, and values are assessed, the individual who is most successful at navigating the hierarchy (depending on the specific demands of the hierarchy) rises to the top. This figure embodies the ideal, because their position allows them to reap the greatest reward. As tribes became more and more interdependent, and as apes evolved to humans, alternative skillsets for survival strategies evolved, where mastery of skillsets that where particularly beneficial to the group increased one’s group value, thus marking the transformation of social structures into prestige based dynamic. As symbolism and dialog evolved into what would become storytelling, individuals gained the ability to learn in greater detail the mechanisms of hierarchies and how to transverse them. The lore of former leaders represented both former and present ideals, but in the form of symbol, and with prestigious admiration, leaders turned into ‘heroes. The hero represented that which others aspired to be like for one reason or another, representing he/she who was able to traverse the domains of man and attain the pinnacle place amongst man. Since we could represent multiple hierarchies in stories, multiple tribes could engage in friendly trade, and thus the customs and preferences of tribes turned into wide spread community cultures. As these stories compiled, mythologies formed, turning heroes into demi-gods, as from their perch atop the hierarchy of man, they looked down and manipulated the doings of man, similar to how a god might. Additionally, in order to attain leadership status by this point, one had to poses the wisdom and omniscient understanding of a series of complex social and thus moral doings of man, in additional to being incredibly skillful. The seemingly timeless truth this person carried, and command of emotions amongst men was also seen as ‘god-like’. These compiled mythologies offered guides to compete in the now particularly morally complex interdependent cultural social spheres humans engaged in. Overtime, as language developed into writing, compilations of these texts where acquired, and as complex cultures that were made up of multiple tribes within a mass community economically thrived, mythological superstructures were able to emerge. This required communities to be advanced enough that multiple hierarchies existed within these communities, so that multiple high ranking individuals could exist, and have excess time from their duties to study and compare these mythological texts, ultimately to map them out. What then occurred is the hero figures were all compiled, compared, and their morally upright qualities were amassed into singular symbols/religions, which allowed for monotheistic religions to emerge (i.e., superstructures amongst mythologies). That is why in the Judeo-Christian texts god is referred to as king of kings. This capacity for religious superstructures to emerge, allowed for the wide spread of a wildly vast allotment of values, lessons and instructions on how to navigate life to become widespread with ease. Rather than learning thousands of mythologies, one only had to learn the story of one. This wide spread complex compilation of values is what eventually allowed for the emergence of societies, where unprecedented numbers of people could coordinate with one another in increasingly complex and efficient ways, utilizing the customs and preferences provided by their religious superstructure.

In modern times, we find ourselves in civilizations built atop civilizations, and feel as though rules of governing one another emerge from present day dialog, which is only a luxury consideration provided by the unprecedented skill with which our ancestors bequeathed us by utility of religious superstructures. Today we feel that the mythological figures or texts are superfluous to our capacity to create and navigate societies. Unless of course, god is a matter of fact, then we ‘must’ recognize him/her. Perhaps this is because we do not learn wisdom, we realize it after the fact, and the reference of civilizations mutes our dependence on the texts? Either way, the mistake is the assumption that the ‘god’ can simply be done away with. The religious capacity is reflective of our deepest moral truths, truth’s hierarchy being measured by the amount that something *is* across time and space, which as provided in the biological account of the emergence of social structure expressed above, was acquired over the course of tens of millions years. God is often compared to the infinite, and we are separated from god by death and ignorance, relative to our transient life span. For all intents and purposes, millions of years symbolically *is* infinite, more specifically, when pertaining to god, is reflective of that which is infinite within us, and therefore reflective of the deepest truths of humanity. To think ‘god’ can be simply done away with, and that we can just traverse the terrain we left off at, is like taking off your space suit whilst in space, and claiming that is rational and correct, goodluck….

What happened in Kengir is simple. The prisoners of Kengir found themselves in a classic tribal scenario. They utilized skillsets that were more complex in coordination, than those their opponents were using. This in turn allowed them outmaneuver their competitors in seemingly impossible ways. Simply put, by virtue of utilizing more complex social coordination, they were more morally virtuous. The human condition with regard to navigating ourselves morally is inherently tied to our biological truth; which with the addition of time, becomes our metaphysical truth. Put nicely; “Life is suffering. Love is the desire to see unnecessary suffering ameliorated. Truth is the handmaiden of love. Dialogue is the pathway to truth. Humility is recognition of personal insufficiency and the willingness to learn. To learn is to die voluntarily and be born again, in great ways and small. So speech must be untrammeled, so that dialogue can take place, so that we can all humbly learn, so that truth can serve love, so that suffering can be ameliorated, so that we can all stumble forward to the Kingdom of God” – Jordan B. Peterson.

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