Pandemic Culture of Fear

> "War will continue so long as men will allow themselves, individually, to be dominated by passion, and only when men have quelled the inward tumult will the outward horror pass away. Self is the great enemy, the producer of all strife, and the maker of many sorrows. He, therefore, who will bring about peace on earth, let him overcome egotism, let him subdue his passions, let him conquer himself." - James Allen

My strength is in my potential to overcome my self-imposed limitations. The choices I make, for good, or ill is the deciding factor of an empowering life.

Looking back on my life, I spent my youth behaving in impulsive ways. I now realize that I developed these behavior patterns to shield myself from any situation that would threaten my identity.

I see this impulsive thinking in the destructive forces that rule our western world today, I.E corporate social irresponsibility and government overreach. This obscurity freezes western culture into patterns of backward thinking. Proving right from wrong, the world is bent on war and strife. By obscurity, I mean letting shadows of childhood trauma drive living.

There is safety in imposing ideological beliefs on others as it removes the responsibility of examining a traumatic life.

Ralf Waldo Emerson, in the essay on Self-reliance, wrote:

> What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

There is a bombardment of opinions about our duties to each other and the world. It's almost like we are programming our culture to go along with the crowd, instead of following the heart.

When I was younger, my attempts to think for myself were often met with worrying reactions from my parents. To this day, I am not even sure if it was worry for my well-being or worry that I would remind my parents of something they didn't want to face about themselves. You see, thinking independently carries risks. There is a real concern about making harmful choices, for ourselves and others. There is a tendency to try and protect ourselves from the unknown.

The act of protecting individuals from their own mistakes also brings consequences. Should we be free to fail? I'd gather many side with the "It depends" camp. It is true, for example, that a potential king of ancient times, can wreak havoc on the lives of his people, if the light and dark forces within are not integrated within the sovereign.

Catastrophes often cause emotional instability in individuals, and when individuals that have been affected by a crisis, come together, those instabilities can be amplified.

We can see the results of these emotional instabilities on the average German population during World War II when the Nazis party rose to power. During this rise to power, many Germans exhibited xenophobic qualities toward other people of different nationalities. Are these reactions directly attributed to some ingrained nature in some, and not others? Or is it a by-product of the Nazi propaganda machine? Does spreading fear through propaganda cause people to attach their personal enigmas to a ruling party's narrative?

Today, I see polarization based on ingrained ideologies spread through the media that disempower and disenfranchise our future.

One such Ideology I see today is the vaccination/anti-vaccination debate around the pandemic. Putting aside the pros and cons of this position, I experienced reactions from many close to me around my decision to protect myself solely through prevention. Many suggested and attempted to school me, in an authoritarian tone, that I should trust my doctor's recommendations, instead of making my own decisions.

At first, I felt anger around the strong support that the vaccination agenda garnered to become the primary method of ending the pandemic.

Deeply troubled by the reaction of the public towards the popular opinion circulating in the media, I started to look for meaning around what I felt was a problem of perception created by cultural hegemony through the media.

This is a difficult topic, and many will want to stop right here. I ask you to temporarily suspend your judgment for the moment, as I get to the larger picture. My premise might be

flawed, as I'm sure the topic is more complicated than what I make it out to be. There might be other reasons why we devolve into conflicts around ideas, and I also understand that the idea of individual freedoms also has costs that many are not willing to entertain. When we become divided by ideas, and not willing to see the value in supporting the freedom of the individual, as in personal choice freedom, and become unwilling to trust our fellow humans to make their own choices, are we causing damage to our future as a free society?

I found some similarities to our current dilemma in an exchange on a film I recently watched.

At the beginning of this film, "Captain America: Civil War", the Avengers (Superheroes) stop Brock Rumlow, a former S.H.I.E.L.D. agent secretly working for Hydra, an organization bent on world domination, from stealing a biological weapon. In the process of neutralizing this threat, a nearby building gets destroyed, killing innocent people.

After the destruction of the building and the loss of life, the United Nations (UN) brought forth an accord that would govern the actions of the Avengers. A government official asks them to accept oversight, or cease their involvement in world events.

For context, I strongly recommend you watch the related clip "Sokovia Accords Debate" from the Film "Captain America: Civil War (2016)". It's 4 minutes long, and it outlines the moral dilemma that the Avengers are challenged with.

Ironman (Robert Downey Jr), War Machine (Don Cheadle), and Vision (Paul Betany) are in strong support of the agreement. Captain America has doubts about the utility of being subject to

a central authority, and outright rejects the idea. There are other characters in the film that have a stake in this decision, but these roles appear peripheral, except for Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) who at first seems to support the idea as a temporary solution but then realizes the bigger issue.

Feelings of guilt centered around the accidental loss of life seem to be driving the debate. As they go around the room voicing their reasons for supporting or rejecting oversight, notice how each character responds to the issue at hand. From my studies, moral choice depends on upbringing. Based on individual experiences, it appears that the responses to this dilemma fall into two different philosophical categories on Utilitarianism and Deontology. Both positions have interesting dilemmas. While reading them, I realized I fell into the Deontology camp. I can see how Utilitarianism can be useful in certain situations, but I believe that it should be the exception, not the rule. Right now, it's become a rule, like a club that gets wielded in political debates. Do we bring down the hammer through our unconscious need to avoid difficult or controversial topics in the name of perceived safety?

At 2:26 there is a debate between the deontology and utility of subjecting the avengers to an outside decision-making body. Captain America (Chris Evans) responds to Ironman's statement that giving up control of one's decisions is really about avoiding responsibility.

I wonder if he is right? Do we distance ourselves from the pain of our previous failings by giving up our responsibility to choose? In the chaos that comes after a death in the family, or an innocent killed in a car accident, giving up our free will to a

centralized authority seems like a good idea. The more people involved in big decisions, the better, right?

But as Captain America points out near the end of the "Sokovia Accords Debate", trusting others to make the right choices is a part of being human. Even after a personal loss and the regrets that come with it. Does giving decision-making power over to another party shift personal decision-making responsibility? What if that party ends up making a decision that results in the same, or worse conclusions? Retaining the power to learn and grow is the real issue for me. We all affect each other in positive and negative ways depending on many factors. Do we really have enough of the picture to pressure others to think as we do?

There are times when decisions need to be made for the good of the whole, at the expense of the few, like when an individual loses the capacity to make sound decisions that have demonstrable harm to the public. I have found that Utilitarianism works better when applied to organizations, where there is not a sole individual responsible for the action of the group. In the times that we live in, where corporate greed is running amok, it appears to me that we don't actually apply these same values to those organizations. Instead, we over-apply these values to individuals, where is the logic in that? Why do we allow corporate media to have such a strong negative influence on public opinion, and when an individual has concerns about one's health, regardless of the ramifications of that decision for oneself and others, we chastise the individual, while at the same time continue to allow our institutions to have substantial influence over our perceptions, which in turn causes the greatest calamities the world has ever seen?

This is the way I see the polarization around vaccinations related to the COVID pandemic of 2021. Is coercing friends, family, and acquaintances to get vaccinated really about protecting the public, or about the projection of one's own fear of being responsible for another's death?

For me, it's very similar to what Ironman is going through. I see that the guilt around his own past mistakes is a reaction to losing his parents as a young adult. Later in the film, I imagine, because of this guilt, Ironman gives up his [ability to make right choices, for revenge](#). Deep down, Ironman knows he can't trust himself to make sound choices around the issue at hand, so opens himself up to being controlled by another, and later realizes the mistake when the government official imprisons them and plans to imprison them all in an underwater facility because the man is fearful about the power they wield, which, so far, the Avengers have been using responsibly. I believe that giving up control of our choices is what happens when we are unwilling to face the pain of the negative consequences that happen as a result of making mistakes and being human.

Those who seek power, in politics and in other areas of society, use this dynamic as a weapon to create a power differential, in turn, it creates a social situation I call "Cultural Domination" that is consistent in dividing us into positions on a drama triangle. When major mistakes are made in life, instead of learning from the mistake and being determined to make better choices in the future, there is a desire to give up and let others define our lives. There are arguments to be made why oversight can be beneficial, especially in large societies, but in many cases, especially when it involves a personal choice, oversight can go off the rails.

On June 24th the U.S. Supreme Court reversed Roe v. Wade, rolling back nearly half a century of constitutional protections to free choice. I take a utilitarian approach to this topic, I value human life and think that life should be preserved as much as possible, but I understand that the choice remains with the individual. In my view, since this is an issue of violating one's right to choose, overturning this decision is detrimental to our society's well-being, as it aims to make it difficult to exercise one's right to choose. I value choice above all else, I think it creates a healthy society and prevents divisiveness when individuals take it to heart.

In my view, not talking about these issues, or choosing sides in a debate against each other only causes our unmet and unexpressed needs into the shadows.

My wish is for each of us to speak our truth in a kind manner and honor each other by taking responsibility for our actions and reactions. This will reduce abusive behaviors like social pressure to be something we are not. To truly build a better future, every individual needs to come to terms with our own personal divisiveness. I invite you to delve into a discussion with the people you love in a way that includes, rather than divides.

My ask is to be mindful when an urge to give up or take away choice comes up for you, focus on the feelings around that and express yourself from that place.

May the light shining bright be with you always.

About the author

After a cerebral hemorrhage in 2017, my life changed forever. I ended up in the hospital for a physical condition that turned out to be a struggle with the dark and light forces of my spirit. Saddled with regret for a life of wrong-doing, I decide to make it right, for good.

Scott Larson In an age of darkness, I am the light bearer of the coming dawn. As the sun rises may peace rule supreme, now and forever.