

Emotional Ignorance

Maybe humans aren't so smart after all.

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“We are dangerous when we are not conscious of our responsibility for how we behave, think, and feel.”
— **Marshall Rosenberg**, psychologist

We are biased against the negative and biased against confronting the negative. What is negative is considered bad and talked about in hushed tones. This has been going on ever since people noticed that thinking about things has a way of making them happen.

Extolling the positive and condemning the negative is a theme that distinguished Christianity from its tribal competitors, according to Peter Kingsley (1999). Appropriating the good and projecting the evil elsewhere—a universal component of nationalism—has become so ingrained as to be considered a virtue rather than a misdirection. At the same time, everyone knows that the good and the bad jostle for time in our minds. This is true no matter what country you're from.

Endorsing the good has become culture's “high road” and none of us are immune. This might be fine as a guide to intentions, aspirations, and morality, but it's not fine when it comes to health, recovery, and the repair of psychological damage. Various change agents—teachers, politicians, disbursers and enforcers—have dealt us traumas of anxiety, fear, and deprivation as what they see is their moral prerogative.

As a therapist, if you can't help your clients integrate their dark sides, then your future impact will go down the bleak road of cognitive behavioral therapy. Those who can't see the negative are easily misled by promises and attractions. Enduring change must build on a firm moral foundation. The 1968 science fiction sex comedy "Barbarella" satirizes emotional ignorance and moral failure.

Sex is not the problem. The Seven Deadly Sins are symptoms, not causes. Thinking is not the solution because thinking can be manipulated. The thing about emotions, and what makes emotions so important, is that they grow slowly and can't be ignored. Ideas guide our mouths but our hands and feet follow our emotions.

Short-sighted thinking is also a symptom, not the problem. The problem is a lack of empathy, altruism, and awareness of the whole. We might call this a lack of "emotional intelligence," but since that doesn't tell us how to do it, it's not clear this is an intelligence at all. Just because psychologists have tests for emotional intelligence doesn't make it real.

Holism is pragmatic. The recognition of emotion comes from this tradition. It is central to the philosophy of William James, seen as the father of modern psychology.

Problems arise because emotions are difficult to measure. Emotional forces may be primary, but the evidence of emotion is elusive. Emotions don't leave fingerprints while actions do, and actions always seem to be justified intellectually.



"On the other hand, he's really good on infrastructure and tax reform."

Tyranny

Successful tyrants are intellectual geniuses and emotional idiots. I suspect this describes Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Western politicians may qualify on these criteria but let's focus on these two. Less powerful members come from corporate leadership, three percent of whom are also estimated to be sociopaths.

Pundits and politicians speculate on the goals of leadership. There is talk about tyrants as autocrats but little talk about them as people like us. We're concerned with predicting their effects on our investments as that's where we feel them. If you're more sensitive, then you'll feel them in your heart.

The tensions ongoing in Europe and Asia are centuries old. If there is any silver lining to these clouds it is the golden opportunity to learn world history. A small consolation even if people did learn. Maybe there's something you can do?

Most of us avoid focusing on what we don't want to see; it just doesn't seem to help. And while we don't want to wear the boots of tyrants, we'd like to have that kind of power. Their dark side is our dark side, and it remains dark because we—like tyrants—are more attached to our emotional needs than our evolution. We need to evolve.

Cultures have emotions too. Just as a person can lose control and commit crimes, cultures can too: the Vikings, Romans, Huns, Post-colonial White America, Germany, and Rwanda. Remember the Alamo but forget Wounded Knee. Cultural crimes make people especially uncomfortable. When confronted with class accusations we're quick to shout "Prejudice!" and exonerate ourselves in victimhood... and so it stays dark.

Ukraine has its own culture, territory, and language. Its people have suffered the ravages of Russian imperialism since well before the dawn of the 20th century. One of Stalin's lesser known initiatives was the mass murder of Ukrainian poets.

"Kobzars were a unique class of musicians in Ukraine, who traveled between towns and sang dumas, a meditative poem-song. Kobzars were usually blind, and required the completion of a three-year apprenticeship in specialized Kobzar guilds, in order to be officially recognized as such. In 1932, on the order of Stalin, the Soviet authorities called on all Ukrainian Kobzars to attend a congress in Kharkiv. Those that arrived were taken outside the city and were all put to death."
— Wikipedia

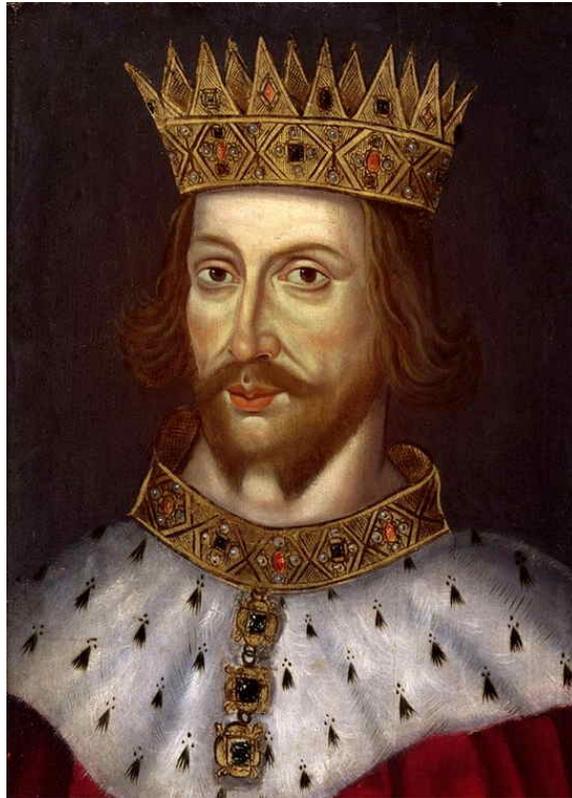
Let me put in a plug in for my friend Julian Kytasty and his album, "Black Sea Winds – the Kobzari of Ukraine." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3x79AI63ZYY>

Their enmity toward the Russians led the Ukrainians to ally with the Nazis. Twenty-five percent of the Jews murdered in the holocaust—one million people—were Ukrainian Jews murdered in the Ukraine. Ukraine then suffered the brunt of the ground and air war. Five to seven million Ukrainians, 25 percent of the country's population, died in World War II.

Brutality, depravity, psychopathology, and carnage are nothing new. Putin's invasion cannot be seen as new opportunism. It is a combination of 19th Century monarchism, irredentism—the recovery of lost territory—and revanchism, otherwise known as pure revenge. It won't be resolved by victory or compromise. Real resolution lies only in the integration of the dark side.

Putin's moves can be ascribed to certain intellectual arguments such as its having worked before, his time is running out, he's sitting on an otherwise unprofitable war chest, Russia's control of almost half of Eastern Europe's energy, and a tradition of entitlement. Donald Trump called Putin's invasion "genius" (Gedeon, 2022), which is a statement of singular emotional ignorance.

These factors are mirrored in the situation of Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and their government's attitude toward Taiwan. Putin's strategy may not bear the fruit to which he aspires, but members of the PRC are carefully watching events that demonstrate the world's otherwise inscrutable thoughts and actions (Matthews, 2022).



Democracy

Democracy has been compared to two wolves and a sheep deciding on what's for dinner. Democracy easily slips into populism, as we have repeatedly seen. It was for this purpose that republics are created, where representatives are empowered to govern. The idea is that representatives, being under less pressure and being more informed, are better able to see all sides, including the dark side.

It is republics, not democracies, that are implemented in what we call "the free world." The concept has its roots in the indigenous society of the pre-colonial Iroquois Nation. Here, social control was woven into a more psychologically integrated culture. Today this is forgotten.

Russian and Chinese territories have been ruled autocratically for over a millennia. Russia's experiment with democracy in the 1990s was without precedent, and it failed.

China's army of 8,000 life-sized terra cotta soldiers protect the burial mound of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor. It is now 40 years since its rediscovery, yet only 1% of the burial mound has been excavated. Qin Shi Huang's mountain-sized mausoleum was erected to ensure his immortality, but the horror of his rule led to his subjects erasing him from history. China's legacy of tyranny has yet to be broken.

These states have a history of autocratic power and monarchic governance. They have no cultural model for autonomy. Their rapid ascent to power in the 20th century has been due to a combination of forced organization and external trade. In the equation of globalism, greater trade is supposed to foster greater alliance and a shift away from imperial attitudes. Do you see it?

As outsiders who live in what we call a free world, our response to the expansion of autocracy has been

appeasement, opportunism, and gamesmanship. Those living under tyranny have little choice. Maintaining complacency is the autocrats' aim. The conservative Cato Institute has an interesting appraisal of people's attitudes toward aggression at the start of WWII (Powell, 2014). Regardless of your political persuasion, this is a good time to review history.

Monarchs, emperors, tsars, and kings always take credit for improved economic conditions. Of course they do, just as they don't take blame. It reminds us of abusive parents who subjugate their children for order in the family and their own profit. When there is no one to object, what else can we expect?

What we call "the Dark Ages," a period of roughly 800 years, was marked by economic, intellectual, and cultural decline presided over by the tyrannical structures similar to those that congratulate themselves for maintaining order today. The Dark Ages were typified by small wars and other actions that were a net waste of resources. A suit of armor cost five oxen. Which was more productive? What did we gain? The invention of the horse shoe.



Mentality

What are the roots of a tyrant's mentality? What are the roots of the craving for power? Are these social aberrations or the dark side of ourselves that we deny? Just as winning athletes are not people with normal psychologies, neither are leading politicians. These are not personalities that develop without a social context. We create them.

Wars are a cultural event. It makes no more sense to blame one individual for causing a war than it does to credit an acorn with causing an oak tree. Pontius Pilate may have condemned Jesus Christ, but Christ's execution was the will of Rome. To understand wars and other horrible behaviors we have to understand the collective action of people to install and obey sociopaths.

“The most essential fact to bear in mind is that the key to Western European society in the Central Middle Ages was land, or, more specifically, the ownership of land. As a result, the interests of landowners often shaped warfare.” — from *Warfare in Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages*, <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/history/history-study-guides/warfare-in-western-europe-in-the-central-middle-ages/>

Many of us contribute to forces we don't believe in, averting our eyes from the ill-uses of our labor. This comes so naturally that we don't think twice. I knew a gentle grandfather who worked on missile launching systems at Los Alamos, and an enthusiastic colleague in hydrodynamics whose theories happened to model uranium projectiles passing through steel. The pacifist Einstein triggered the atomic arms race.

Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine. Major General "Buck Turgidson" (Kubrick, 1964) Curtis LeMay ordered the firebombing of Tokyo. We blame them. But it was hundreds of peaceful people like I.M.Pei, the architect of Washington's National Gallery of Art, who developed the incendiary devices that burned 16 square miles of residential Tokyo in the most destructive act of war in history.

Acts of war are defensive in theory, but offensive in practice. By the time war is conducted there is no room for discretion. The intellect is driven by a will to prevail and emotions are driven by fear. The message is not only that we're willing to support this, but that we're willing to support situations that lead to it, leaders who accept it, and participation in cultures and economies that engage in and condone it.

It should be clear to us all that as long as we're paying for the armies to fight wars, we are responsible for them. We will say, "Yes, but we only fight just wars!" This is exactly the point: the people we install are capable of justifying anything, and we think that's okay.

It's not really the tyrant's mentality that's the problem. There will always be sociopaths and there will always be nice people making destructive machines. The problem lies with those of us who either support building the machines or give sociopaths the power to use them.



Change

I see three causes of this problem:

1. the power to wage war, which is a power that we create;
2. the authority to wage war, which is an authority that we fail to control; and

3. a collective feeling of responsibility for each other and our environment, which is a feeling that we don't have.

These all point back to our individual failure to integrate our darker nature. This is closely related to our resistance, fear, and sorrow. We are afraid to develop a full emotional awareness of our effects on others, our environment, and ourselves. This stems from our own emotional sorrow in fully remembering and empathizing with our past and our own low self-esteem.

Just as we build weapons to protect our territories, we build armoring to protect our egos. The seeds of indifference grow into culture-wide attitudes of entitlement. Some of us try to improve ourselves more than others and there's nothing wrong with failure when we try, but many of us avoid recognizing the collective indifference of which we are a part. We don't recognize the separation we maintain and the isolation we endorse.

To go down another layer, emotional disconnection is considered good professional practice. As managers we watch the bottom line leaving morality to religion. As therapists we're told, "Don't make friends with your clients." Have unconditional positive regard, but don't make a personal investment. Much of what the therapy profession does maintains the status quo. I don't support this status quo and I won't toe this therapeutic line.

Nations go to war because citizens don't care about their neighbors and don't heal their own families. Healing isn't always happy, it can also mean setting boundaries, starting over, or opening up to one's own disquiet. It means entering the dark side. This is not simply transference and counter-transference, matters of incidental reflex and projection. There is always a dark side. A real therapist takes a real risk.

Major dysfunctions at the top of Maslow's pyramid of needs—that area of spiritual discretion—have their roots in thousands of smaller dysfunctions at the base—the realm of necessity. That is to say, in the foundations of our personalities and our unexamined needs. Intellect is the boat we sail but emotions are the currents of the ocean. As Homer wrote in the Iliad & the Odyssey: take any boat you like but the ocean will determine your fate.

Greater empathy starts with each of us. We all can become more sensitive. We don't have to know why, gain more power from it, or notice a change in those around us. Small changes won't make big differences, and even big differences don't change anything immediately. The pace of change is set by the currents that distribute it.

We can be subversive and we can cause change but we have to stick our necks out. As a hypnotherapist I'm told to avoid giving unrequested suggestions, but I find that unacceptable. I'll drop the seed of greater empathy into my clients unawareness without waiting to be asked. I'll plant seeds in an effort at reforesting empathy.

Healing has many levels and there are many perspectives to any story. As a therapist I've learned that the presenting problem is a symptom. The real problem lies deeper down. The problems of culture lie further down still, in the dark, but you can see them if you know where to look.

In his book *LSD and the Mind of the Universe*, Christopher Bache (2019a), a morally well-grounded and otherwise innocent professor of religious studies, arranged over 70 carefully planned and supported LSD excursions into the depths of his psyche. These gradually deepening excursions took him to the depths of humanity's hell and left asking himself, "Where is this place and why am I here?" He concluded that it's really there. Events remind us that it is.

"We have to face our shadow in order to get to the gold on the other side of the shadow... how

many of our children and grandchildren are going to have to die before we will be willing to make the changes that we are not willing to make today?"

— **Chris Bache** (2019b)

We can ask ourselves, “How would your situation change if you had greater feelings for others, and they for you?” We can suggest a growing concern for the safety of others and that others have greater concern for us. In a more empathic world you see others differently, you understand them more deeply, and they will react with deeper understanding toward you.

We are never healing just one person. Every person who comes to us represents part of our whole species’ thought-form. Big healing works to heal what is big, but it also heals us as individuals.

“Most of us Westerners are afraid of spiritual phenomena. They are strange to us. We need some conceptual context to help us make sense of these phenomena so that we can be more at peace with our own and more supportive of others’ spiritual awakening.”

—**Emma Bragdon**, psychotherapist (2006)

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