

Psychotic Paradox Proposed

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In terms of intellectual development, human behavior may justly be viewed as both adaptive and maladaptive. In the short run, it is adaptive in that it helps an individual adjust to his cultural group's values by permitting him to accept any obvious contradictions between the real and ideal. As a means to short-term adaptation, stupidity is a classic example of the "Neurotic Paradox" which promotes behavioral patterns which are subject to immediate short-term reinforcement although the long-term results will be negative. [1] A related drawback is that short-term errors may be hard to overcome in the long run [2] if the immediate decision sets you off on a bad behavioral pathway which becomes progressively more and more difficult to escape from later. Addictions to drugs or "Pleasure" would be commonplace examples of this basic physio/psychological principle of learning and life. [3] As philosopher Honoré de Balzac noted, "Pleasure is like certain drugs, to continue to obtain the same result, one must double the dose, and death or brutalization is contained in the last one".[4] Governmental deficit spending is cultural example of this principle in action.

If such conduct is adaptive in helping one fit into his immediate surroundings, it can be mala-daptive over the long run, as it inhibits innovations and constructive criticism of the social environment. Individuals adjust to the group, but the group loses its capacity to adjust to its surroundings as members sacrifice their individual integrity, insight and ideas and conform to prevailing mores for the rewards of social acceptance.

Of course, the bottom line, long-term net effect of the neurotic paradox is negative, but its presence cannot be understood without recognition of its role in helping people adapt to their immediate, short-term social situation. Thus, it becomes clear how there can be so much dysfunction around although it is, in the long run, maladaptive. Survival within the system is promoted if one is disposed to accept the system's stupidities. Also, short-term survival of the system (institution, group, etc.) is promoted through enhanced social cohesion. However, these immediate gains are counter-tered by the long-term loss of induced inefficiency of information processing. Our cultural life is really a very human trade off among these three dependent features: 1.) objective,

rational, logical processing of information; 2.) psychological gratification and self-image of the individual and 3.) Group cooperation [5] and social cohesion.

With the qualification of arbitrariness in mind, it should be noted that most people who find maladaptation in others judge efficiency of processing information and usually do not even consider the emotional and social dimension of decisions affecting individual and institutional life. Accordingly, what might be regarded as stupidity may in fact be a healthy, short-term compromise with psychic satisfaction and group cohesion. Real dysfunction develops when one factor (information processing, psychic comfort or social cohesion) disrupts the others.

Let us propose the Psychotic Paradox as a psycho/cultural mechanism of delayed gratification which blocks short-term, immediate presumed advantages for the sake of possible rewards to be gained later—as when a worker goes on strike, thus sacrificing the all but tangible reality of the next paycheck for the sake of a potentially bigger one in the future. Corporation founder Walter Chrysler personified this principle: He was always willing to accept a short-term risk for a long-term payoff [6].

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