

American Siblings Where Art Thou?

The Search for Reality and Ultimate Meaning in Words from Science and Philosophy in American Culture.

Preamble: Irreducible Ego

Prior to writing this I thought for a long time about what bias involvement in American Culture might bring to this research investigation, as well as to the possibility it might change the outcome of the conclusion. But really, all this is saying is that to an extent, my 'abiding self', a Buddhist term for how a person might be like a lit candle, is limited by my time in the kiln of American Culture. I ask my audience to please keep this in mind while reading.

I think the big issue in the way of anyone trying to explore those answers worthy of a general reader. As stated above, I am limited to my experience and so this research document will contain the coloring of my own development by unavoidable necessity. I also have unconscious preferences determined by genetic parameters; which alone cannot represent everyone in society. So, in moving on I acknowledge the irreducible presence of my personal bias and am willing to constructively converse with others about how this might have affected my research.

Exploratory Framework

In order to get started I need to invite James Herrick, but only for a moment. Sorry Mr. Herrick. Loved your book but get out. (Narrator accompanies James Herrick into the conceptual hallway and closes apartment door). Anyway, in his work, Herrick refers to the "new formats of digital and visual culture." (Herrick, 2016)

I began thinking about what space these formats occupy in our brains. And also, how these formats of rhetoric can affect global and localized identity formation in humans. When I think of the word 'new' in the context of the history of rhetoric, concerning both digital and visual culture, I think it's safe to start with radio and television and end with the present time as a sort of 'in-progress' window. The rhetoric of digital culture is active in formation this moment and ad infinitum until human extinction; or on a wider scale, the extinction of language use in the solar system, galaxy, or even Universe.

Beyond Human-Sensed Reality

It was the great Marshall McLuhan who said, “the medium is the message.” (McLuhan, YouTube). But if one gazes at cultures long enough one finds words at the foundation of every medium. Our audible symbols of meaning. This is not to diminish images. After all, supposedly a picture is worth a thousand words. Pictures have their place, but here we're discussing words.

Words have changed the world. Words define and destroy the world. Words are everything and they are nothing. What we call knowledge and wisdom has at its base an enormous cultural organization of meaning archives. Carl Jung observes that human beings gravitate toward order in the world because “life itself has no rules. That is its mystery and its unknown law. What you call knowledge is an attempt to impose something comprehensible on life.” (Jung, 2008)

To reach infinity and beyond we need to loosen our mind's grip on our brain. I'd like to begin with a few quotes I have always cherished. I think they're relevant here. They are:

1. “Any theoretical physicist that’s any good knows six or seven theoretical representations for exactly the same physics...and that nobody is ever going to be able to decide which one is right at that level, but he keeps them in his head hoping they’ll give them different ideas for guessing.” (Feynman, R., YouTube)
2. “If you really understand Zen, he said (referring to an unnamed Zen Master) you can use any book: you could use the Bible, you could use *Alice in Wonderland*, you could use the Dictionary because he said the sound of the rain needs no translation. (Watts, A, YouTube)

This goes to the schools of Thien. You may be thinking, "What the hell is Thien?" But I assure with a half-hearted guarantee that most Americans have probably heard of Zen. The discipline is not zen-size fits all. What I mean is, in our unprecedented mega individual-consumer-dominated ant hill, we sell Zen as a lifestyle to the spiritually material. Here I shine the light on myself, having once been enticed by a spider web of product rhetoric (advertisement) for something called an **Asus Zenbook**; beautiful thing that it is. (:

Thien is Zen is Ch’an ... you get it. A throwback to a classic Aristotelian syllogism in format. But the context here arrived at by Socratic Method (Question, Analyze, Simplify), is to purposely call it something else to understand the background space which holds the clearest picture of what it actually is outside, as well as inside human-sensed-reality.

This speaks to the experience of understanding that to some extent all of reality is a meta-reflection of physical phenomenon experienced with some latency using the interpretation of the

senses: (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell). This doesn't mean we can't be precise. We just need to build frameworks around checking our work, because we are primates after all.

Practical Application to Language Use and Identity Formation

But what does that mean? That idea, that is of frameworks, is the fundamental linguistic link to the state of human beings and their collective ability to communicate to aid survival. Noam Chomsky says the following about the human body of knowledge concerning language governance as well as its limitations:

“We can say a fair amount about the principles that make it possible for us to behave in our normal creative fashion, but as soon as questions of will or decision or reason or choice of action; when those questions arise, human science is at a loss. It has nothing to say about them ... as far as I can see these questions remain in the obscurity in which they were in classical antiquity.” (Chomsky, YouTube)

On a common-sense level, or on the level of what a culture's Wisdom Tradition prescribes, cooperation and diplomacy yield far better results than violence, not to mention, when considering the Earth as a unit, much more energy efficient from an evolutionary timeline perspective. I don't mean to say that violence in the context of protection is unnecessary. I think that idea in this world is laughable from an implementation perspective. We need weapons. We're keeping them.

What we can't afford are the un-educated. And that term may rouse the beginnings of the feeling of being attacked if one feels insecure about their education. The good news is that the Internet makes free education possible for anyone around the world with a web node. That is the most amazing thing. Consider the entire human evolutionary timeline.

I'll paraphrase below in a table surmised from a written piece by the great Carl Sagan, titled *The Cosmic Calendar*. In a nutshell, the entire known historical evolution of the Universe is mapped onto a traditional calendar year. January 1st is host to the event we call the 'Big Bang.' The only day we'd be concerned with for the sake of this paper is the date: December 31st of that calendar year.

This is because on this scale, Humans don't exist until about 10:30 PM. And in fact, according to Sagan, what we call 'Now' is "the first second of New Year's Day". This encompasses the "widespread development of science and technology; emergence of a global culture; acquisition of means for self-destruction of the human species; first steps in spacecraft planetary exploration and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence." (Sagan, 1977)

Mass Media Mini-Manipulations & Human Psychology

The news spun from perspectives magnetized to American political polarity are absorbing the food of (stick with me) subjective-localized-individual & cultural-experiential reality. I know. I'm sorry your brain had to chew those oats.

They are important though because out of this performance in 21st century domestic theatrical production and manufacturing, an excrement forms as a by-product, one that is eroding the American Trust in our news media outlets. And just in case anyone might be wondering...yes, we just need to know the objective news. Or you know, what's **true**. AND YES! I heard the can of worms open too; just please humor me with reading the rest of what I have to say.

The Way Out as Individuals for the 'Good' of the Culture

So, give me an example you say. Who fights clean? I'd say the BBC is a respectable outlet. Here's some text about their operating ethos: "All BBC output, as appropriate to its subject and nature, must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, and corroborated. We should be honest and open about what we don't know and avoid unfounded speculation." (BBC, 2020)

Some may disagree, but they're all wrong! (I hope your eyes are rolling.) Sarcasm aside, I think our way out of this as media consumers feigning helplessness is to realize we're not helpless. Ok. Duh. But now we must realize that we don't have to do much, just turn our heads away from the following:

1. the foaming spew of anchor personality interjected with some bull-shit spin-off of deluded Gonzo idealism,
2. and from the spiff and span of their light reflecting foreheads.

My friend, we must look to the right side of their headlines, and finally LOOK to the SOURCE of the information. We have lapsed and need to become again or remain vigilant about finding and consuming news sources which are **in conflict with one another**. The idea being, if news conglomerates are both reporting the same thing (**Truth**), then why is the information different!?

The former is a statement because we know the answer. Pull the weeds. We want the crop.

Again, the (**Truth**). See: Agent Fox Mulder. But hear this: **We want Truth from you and that is ALL.** Now DJ; Queue up the media consuming public forcing change by mass demand.

Media Madness: A New Hope

Hearken back to the Clooney line in "Oh Brother Where Art Thou" where Ulysses Everett McGill says, "I would like to address your attitude of hopeless negativism" and advises his friend to "Consider the lilies of the goddamn field."

This past few years we've noticed that basically the only thing shared by the news feeds is trying to sell the American mentality as a game of red team vs. blue team. (Fox News vs. CNN) They agree only on the sports information pumped around the AP network.

That is until recently...a glimmer of hope. A story from each, both observed Sunday the 22nd of November 2020, though admittedly full of loaded spin, like the phrase..."vaccine czar"... tisk tisk Wolfy. And yes, I realize he didn't write the headline, but if we're going to hold someone accountable at CNN, it's Wolfy, because he can take it...so put a sock in it and keep reading.

Here's the novelty: it seems both these corporate idiots (remember corporations are people under the law) finally figured out...cite the expert! Wow! Great idea! So, I'd like to close this section with an endearing shout-out: *Dear American Media: **Shame** for misleading folks while counting your stacks. When you get time, listen to the song 'Dirty Laundry.'* That is all. (Aitken, 2020)
(Tapper, 2020)

Language and Reputation

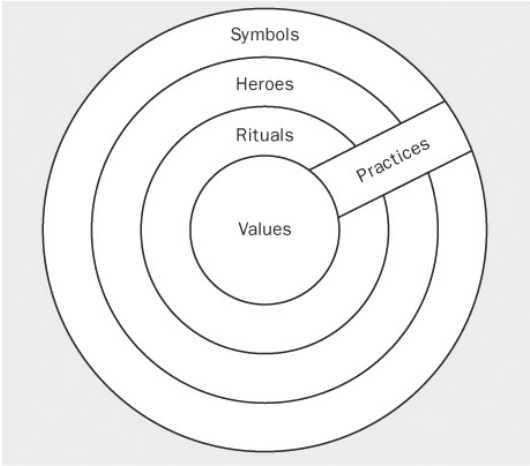
Another interesting in-progress example for how truth is mapped to language can be found in the translation of one the best 007 movies of all time; the best simply because it informed the creation of perhaps the greatest parody movie of all time, right next to Spaceballs...Austin Powers. But in case you already know, give up, or don't actually care, the title of the Bond film is "The Evil Dr. No". The Spanish translation of the title for a televised broadcast of the film is "El Satanico Dr. No."

This is extremely interesting. In the English language the title suggests a reference to the character Dr. No. This person sounds ominous in name only and has also already confirmed that this person's description is paired with the parameter flag: 'Evil.' Or to grease the wheels of reader sentiment; not good, whatever that may ultimately mean.

Now what is interesting here in the Spanish language is the fact that there is no word serving as an abstract categorical identifier. Whereas in English 'Evil' is a category for human actions in opposition to the category of 'good.' In Spanish, an evil person is directly described as affiliated with 'Satan', the personified antagonist to God's will in the Judeo-Christian Tradition. Here we see language absolutely solidify identity of an individual for the rest of a given group by mere association of an adjective with an agent of, and in many cases, extreme superstition and fear.

This has occurred in the example within a popular film title translation. However, imagine the possible damage with this characterization in private life, where a person’s reputation can be defined by a single association in the minds of one’s peer social group. Pretty staggering really. And these tendencies are embedded in our deepest cultural programming and are a conceptual baseline which “represents the universal level in one’s mental software...it is the ‘operating system’ that determines our physical and basic psychological functioning.” (Hofstede, 2010)

Figure 1.2: The ‘Onion’: Manifestations of Culture at Different Levels of Depth shows very well how words ultimately interact with our cultural programming. (Hofstede, 2010)



Layer	Definition
Symbols	“Are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning that is recognized as such only by those who share the culture.” (Hofstede, 2010)
Heroes	“Are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a culture and thus serve as models for behavior.” (Hofstede, 2010)
Rituals	“Are collective activities that are technically superfluous to reach desired ends but that, within a culture, are considered social essential.” (Hofstede, 2010)
Values	“Are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others...deal with pairings

	such as the following: Evil versus good.” (Hofstede, 2010)
Practices	Directed out across all layers from the central ‘Values’. (Hofstede, 2010)

What is ‘Good’ and How?

It seems that Goodness is Truth. And Truth is survival. We may have extra flab to survive some lean truth seasons. But we can't lose the source. It's our magnetic north of the human heart. We know what this is; we just know because it's useful for our species to know the floor of civility.

Try on this hypothetical. Neanderthal meets human. They can speak to each other. The human knows the Neanderthal has the drop on great hunting and fishing grounds. The Neanderthal has the 411 as the kids would say. The human insists they're friends. The Neanderthal decides to trust this person because they have met this person a few times before and had no issues. The Neanderthal doesn't realize that the human is an Iago type character. Please see Jafar's parrot companion in the original Aladdin. Or even better, read Othello.

It's easy to lose focus on what is collectively good vs. what is personally good. See running the United States of America is about a collective good. So, we need to do our best. But what is best? The word 'best' is well-intentioned rhetoric at best, but alas, it is subjective. But what is perfect? Well, it's impossible for starters, but a fantastic goal if you're aware of the former Wisdom. So, what to do?

Finding Accurate Information

Compare folks. We need to compare. How you ask? Well, let's consult our ubiquitous network of Babel, or colloquially; the Web, or my favorite, the Information-Super-Highway. After consulting DuckDuckGo on the matter of "how to make the perfect rice?" A pursuit I am sure others have mastered eons ago, I find a few top results, and also a few candidates I'd personally vote as the 'best' options to make 'perfect' rice. After all, how many of us really go beyond page 1 results unless we have to, or we're the hostage of a demanding (neutral connotation intention) research effort and must find a certain volume of sources to extrapolate meaning from the subject.

In my own studies of Eastern Philosophy, I judged and dismissed Chogyam Trungpa as a teacher for his alcoholism and another reported incident involving one of his students. And if I had applied those standards to him that are applied to people in office, I would have avoided him indefinitely, and I did for a long time in my reading.

That is until I signed up for audible plus and his book caught my eye. Anyway, back to class.

The point is that this person was a genius. They were special in that they kept a basic truth about human basic goodness in full sight. We need this principle etched in our language going forward as a 'best' practice to linguistically program our future to be better for our future DNA semaphores, also known as babies.

Conclusion

We can turn the world whichever way we want now. Evolution, as long as we're more careful going forward, is a rudder, not a railway track. We are allowed to participate completely in our own self-governance. Is that the axiom of intelligent life formation across worlds? That nature hands the reigns to the newly-intelligent victims of self-awareness? Or that we've named it God, as Spinoza, Einstein, and many virulent others might term it. But here, I'm sure it will accept 'Nature' as well, as perhaps it isn't interested in such details. But we should be.

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