

The human psyche - as inside so outside

(quoted from: Franz Ruppert (2019). Who am I in a traumatised and traumatizing Society? Steyning: Green Balloon Publishing, pp. 6 – 14)

As human history shows, the reason that determines whether we live a good life, or whether we become a nuisance to each other, lies not so much in our natural environment as within ourselves. For example, people went to war not because of hunger and food shortages, but because of religious and economic reasons, or the personal ideologies of troublemakers and warmongers (Harari, 2015). Even material wealth and the meeting of basic needs for food, drink, clothing, and shelter do not automatically lead to a greater satisfaction with life, or to a peaceful cohabitation.

Whether we humans are cooperative or aggressive depends in the first instance on the state of our psyche. Whatever our psyche looks like, so we fashion our social and natural environment. If chaos reigns within our psyche, we organise chaos in our external world. If we are at peace within our psyche, we can establish clear and orderly conditions in our environment: as inside, so outside.

If that is the case then there is at least a glimmer of hope for our social communities. At least this way we would know what we can/could work on collectively. We would have to:

- learn to understand our human psyche better, and...
- collectively and individually work on this...

in order to utilise our psyche for life enhancing rather than destructive intentions, for our own well-being and benefit.

Essentially, our human psyche is a fantastic tool. It has enormous capacity and potential. It can serve us very well as long as we nurture and care for it as something precious, delicate and valuable. It is not predetermined at birth through 'genes', but influenced through our relationships and lifestyle (Bauer, 2002). Therefore, if our psyche is influenced by negative experiences in life, violent relationships, poisoned by unbearable feelings and misled by misunderstandings, our psyche can and must be constantly readjusted.

If we want to lead a better life and not continue to fight each other, we have to gain a better understanding of why the human psyche so easily entangles in aggressive disputes in our interpersonal relationships. Why does the psyche invest so many energies in escalating perpetrator-victim dynamics instead of searching for constructive solutions? We have to learn how to free ourselves from these endlessly destructive loops. We should not allow or accept becoming slaves of our damaged psyche!

I am certain now, due to extensive work with people in my psychotherapy practice, and from examination of my own psyche, that the crucial reason for human destructiveness is the traumatising of our psyche. The traumatised psyche leads to endless perpetrator-victim relationship dynamics. If we understand, acknowledge and recognise this fact, a way out of this cycle of destructiveness becomes available, even if it has been in place for a long time and we are habitually used to it. We can learn to be at one with ourselves, and meet other people with goodwill and sympathy even if we have endured much suffering in our life, and inflicted suffering on others.

The prerequisite for this is the willingness to confront our own psyche and our personal history. This requires the company of like-minded people on the same journey. Significant also are the methods that can help us fully understand our psyche, heal it from its injuries, and keep it healthy. These techniques do exist now. With the 'intention method' I have developed a very useful tool with which to explore our psyche, and face the traumas contained within. Generally, the aim is to find a way of becoming constructive when we have lost ourselves in destructive relationships.

Individuals are responsible for his or her willingness to confront their own psyche. In that, nobody can be forced. Once we have made this fundamental decision we will certainly find people who support us on our journey, and who in turn may benefit from our help.

Needlessness, pleasure principle, or learning through reward?

For some time now religious leaders, philosophers and psychologists have tried to answer the question: what impels us humans to do what we do? What makes us happy and what makes us suffer? Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, saw in our thinking and behavioural processes the main obstacle for a happy life. Therefore, he advised us to free ourselves from all things that induce suffering: the emotional attachment to our needs and ideas that never allow us to be satisfied, and always wanting more. Instead of trying to change feelings that surface now and again and then disappear, he recommended simply leaving them be, not to take them seriously, and dismiss both past and future. For that, he developed numerous meditation techniques, for example paying conscious attention to our breathing.

In the Western world, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) considered it to be the 'pleasure principle' that we all followed. He said that we constantly strive to experience pleasure and avoid the unpleasurable. With the help of this principle individuals should at least be able to take care of themselves. In the wake of the First World War, and a looming Second World War however, Freud grew increasingly pessimistic. At the end of his life he believed that not just 'Libido' and 'Eros' were at force in the human being (to live and to love), but also 'Thanatos', an unconscious urge that leads us individually and collectively to stupor, death, and doom. "The fateful question of the *human species seems to me to be whether, and to what extent, the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.*" (Freud, 1979, page 128). For Freud the ideal way to liberate the individual from 'neuroses', leading to a better existence, was to apply depth psychology in the confrontation with our experiences, especially those from a frustrating childhood. He had no idea what to do regarding society as a whole, "since nobody has the authority to impose this therapy onto the masses." (ibid)

The response of behavioural psychologists to the question "why do we do what we do?" was a little different. They thought that we strive for rewards and avoid punishment. Because of that, we would quickly learn what rewards us ('positive reinforcement'), and refrain from all those things that we see as punishing us ('negative reinforcement'). According to Frederik B. Skinner (1904-1990), one of the founders of this theory, this principle can be of optimal use in getting people to do what the authorities define as 'desirable behaviour'. His political vision of the use of this form of learning theory on the whole of society is given literary expression in his novel "Walden Two" (Skinner, 1972).

Doubtlessly reward and punishment can motivate people to change, at the very least, their expressed attitude. However, this then opens the floodgates for human manipulation: only those who have authority, power and money can define what is 'desirable' and 'undesirable' behaviour, usually according to their own interests, and then condition others until they become accustomed to it and believe that there is no alternative. A report in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" from 19 May 2017 indicates that the Chinese government has scientists working on the development of a point system for each citizen, which identifies and evaluates them publicly as good or bad. By merging all kinds of electronically stored data, the academics involved in the project consider this to be a real and nationwide possibility in China. By the help of face detection software and Big Data, George Orwell's Vision of "Big brother is watching you!" is now reality – and not only in China.

Without an inner authority that decides to uphold certain behaviour despite punishment, every person could be completely controlled through external influences. However, evidently there is such an inner authority in all humans, and it can be quite resistant to external reward and punishment. This is proven by the examples of young habitual offenders, or drug addicts, or those young girls who voluntarily join the Islamic state in Syria or Iraq and become the architects of their own downfall. In fact neither punishment nor reward will deter some people from crimes, drug use, or shooting innocent people. Luckily, people with clarity of feeling and thought and a healthy self-esteem cannot be so easily impressed and manipulated by reward and punishment either. They know what they want and what they do not want and act of their own accord.

The pharmacological promise of salvation

Spiritual practices and psychotherapy in whatever form demand an engagement with the self, with one's own feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour patterns. Would it, therefore, not be simpler, less time-consuming and less demanding to obtain the desired changes through psychoactive substances? Indeed this has been a human dream for thousands of years. To swallow, drink, inhale, or inject powerful chemical ingredients and in an instance the world seems, at least temporarily, all right again. Alcohol, Ayahuasca, 'bath salts', cannabis, mushrooms, heroin, cocaine, LSD, nicotine, *peyote cacti* ... *the list of psychoactive drugs is long*, and it is added to by whatever substances are concocted every day by the pharmaceutical industry. They enter the market as psychotropic drugs and are sold at high profit as Benzodiazepine, Ritalin, and Seroquel etc.

Nevertheless, experience has shown that the effects of such substances are short-lived, and in fact in the end they often cause the opposite of what they are intended for, as the human brain takes countermeasures. This creates the need to increase the dosage leading to drug and medication dependence. The initial 'psychological disorder' turns into 'mental illness'; 'neuroses' and 'psychoses' become chronic, and the psyches of such people fail to develop further (Ruppert, 2002).

Conscious and unconscious psyche

Buddhism and the great and significant schools of psychology and therapy of the 20th century have one fundamental understanding in common: neither the internal experience nor the external behaviour of humans can be controlled through conscious mind and reasoning, but rather our actions are led by unconscious

psychological processes that we do not notice at all. The unconscious is that which fundamentally exists beyond conscious sensory perception (images, sounds, smells). It is also what we actively repress and banish from our consciousness. The human consciousness is only a quasi-bonus to those psychological processes that take place beyond our conscious awareness, mental processes, and memories. That is why we have to include the unconscious part of our psyche in our investigation of our behaviour and perceptions in our attempts to change. We have to invite our unconscious to reveal itself and make itself accessible to an enlightened verbalisation. Rational analyses alone are of no further help; indeed, they could induce the opposite, vastly strengthening unconscious emotional resistance.

The discovery of bonding and psychotrauma

Since the times of Freud and Skinner, psychologists and psychotherapists have discovered much more about our psyche. In particular, they have identified the emotional bonding process that keeps infants and small children in a symbiotic relationship with their mothers (Bowlby, 1969/2006). Added to the basic understanding of our primal needs, such as food and sexuality, came the realisation that the need for body contact and closeness are also primal instincts and desires. The human species would cease to exist if sexual drives did not continue to prevail. However, the need for emotional closeness and love cannot be excluded or regarded as merely disruptive irrationalities in interpersonal relationships. Physically experienced love is as vital for everyone as his or her daily bread. When love is suppressed in a parent-child or couple relationship we cease to be the higher developed lifeform that humans are; we revert to the level of primitive predators.

As far as I am concerned, after bonding and attachment, psychotraumatology is the second biggest discovery of modern times (Seidler, Freyberger and Maercker, 2011). When medical doctors talk about 'trauma' they refer to injuries of the body through physical or chemical causes (pressure, fire, acid etc). When psychotherapists adopt the term, they are not so much denoting physical injuries, but rather psychological injuries. In the last 50 years psychologists and psychotherapists have gained a much greater understanding of how our life experiences, often traumatising for human perception, feelings, thinking, remembering, and action, affect those concerned. Psychotrauma can pathologically alter our body, and poison human co-existence (Herman, 2003; Levine, 2010; Ruppert & Banzhaf et al, 2018).

The clearer we come to understanding these processes the more obvious it becomes that the ideal of the enlightenment – that everything improves with rational thought and action – is not the key to personal happiness and the wellbeing of societies. Even material reward and professional success cannot compensate for psychological deficits. Ideas such as 'prosperity' or 'employment for all' by themselves do not create harmoniously functioning societies, as capitalist ('liberal', 'market-economy based'), socialist ('social democratic', 'communist'), or nationalist ('republican', 'patriotic') ideologies would have us believe. Even looking at 'environmental issues' through 'green' politics distracts us from our own internal state. Not only flora and fauna are under threat; we are in a crisis ourselves!

Human psyche and reality

The principle function of the human psyche is to make the reality within which a person exists accessible:

- Reality Level 1 is the external world: the concrete ('objective') world consisting of physical and biological factors. So, the earth, the creatures that live on it, and the universe beyond.
- Reality Level 2 is our internal subjective world, as a reflection of the objective world, including the individual's relationship to their surroundings, their environment, to nature and the ties that bind every human to all other living beings.
- Reality Level 3 is the self-constructed world within the psyche that does not exist in level 1 at all.

The human psyche commands several input channels simultaneously, which we call perception. These are the five basic senses; seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. These give us our first impression of what is available in our external world. With this, however, we have to remember that our perception is selective based on our individual needs and interests. We never perceive everything that exists; that would not only be an excessive demand on our psyche, but it would also be pointless.

The next psychological processing stage is the feelings we have about what we perceive. Here are the basic emotions: fear, anger, grief, pain, happiness, revulsion, shame, guilt, pride and love. Feelings are the subjective reaction to perceived reality. Human feelings provide an intense contact with the body. They develop through chemical processes in the body that 'messenger' substances regulate. They appear and disappear again slower than the processes of perception, which the electrical activities in the brain produce.

The subsequent psychological processing stage gives us the concepts we have of the world, based on our perceptions and feelings. This view of the world could be accurate, or it could miss the real world by a long shot. It is more likely to be wishful fantasies than a recognition of what is actually true.

Only thinking processes can free people from their limited and often anthropocentric worldview. In thinking, we can abstract particularities of our perception, and the subjectivity of our feelings, and draw conclusions beyond them. This can lead to an increasingly accurate recognition of reality as it is. At best this is a generally valid perspective, and thus as correct and true for others as it is for me. Since thinking is based on electrical processing of stimuli, thoughts can quickly appear and disappear, and can be replaced by new ones. Thinking is mostly free from physical metabolic processes, however this may result in the illusion that the mind is not connected to the body.

In addition, the human psyche possesses two significant special functions that are to a great extent missing in other lifeforms: the 'I' and the will. In the course of human development, an increasingly autonomous 'I' can develop in the human psyche, and with that an increasingly clear awareness of our 'I' (Bauer, 2015). Through the 'I' the human being obtains an inner point of reference for perception, feeling, thinking, remembrance, and action. The awareness of this 'I' allows further options for self-reflection, the development of a conscious will, and the focused pursuit of a self-transforming process, for example within the context of psychotherapy.

The human psyche is constantly developing. It selectively serves our needs, can adapt well to external circumstances, and is essentially creative. In other words, time and again it can find good solutions for practical problems. The idea that 'mental illnesses cannot be changed because it is genetically determined is scientifically

archaic, and no longer corresponds to current knowledge of the nature of the human psyche, the brain, and genetics (Bauer, 2002).