NARRATIVES

THE FOCUS OF 21ST CENTURY PSYCHOLOGY

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T. L. Brink and Victoria Karalun

Narratives

The Focus of 21st Century Psychology

NOTICE TO THE READER

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Preface

Humans are emotional beings who feel deeply, reason occasionally, and narrate constantly. Narratives are the stories we tell ourselves to help us understand what we are feeling, thinking, and doing. Narratives help us remember the past, interpret the present, and prepare for the future. Narratives justify ourselves, to ourselves and to others. Narratives can motivate our successes, or be used to excuse our failures. To change our lives, we must change our narratives.

This book should not be regarded as a rejection of traditional religion, classical philosophy, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanistic psychology, or cognitive science. These are the milestones of humanity's attempts to understand human nature. We accept these as the building blocks for a more complete formulation.

The first chapter explains what narratives are, and why all narratives are not equal (and some are even deadends). The second chapter focuses on the most important thing in the study of humans (their values) and why we must distinguish between the ultimate, the utilitarian, and the ulterior dimensions of relevance. The third chapter reviews the role of religious narratives in understanding those values (historically, and in the present; in society, and in individuals). The fourth chapter considers classical philosophy, especially logic, and how this contributes to narratives (but cannot always save us from the dead-end narratives of conspiracy theory and determinism). The fifth chapter charts the historical development of psychology as a science (from mind, to behavior, to mental processes, to narrative and willpower). The sixth chapter looks at the lifespan, and how narratives develop as we confront the challenges posed by our changing relationships. The seventh chapter goes into greater depth on the interacting roles of adulthood: spousal, parent, career, consumer. The last chapter emphasizes the need for resilience and transformation in order to flourish and find flow in those roles.

Chapter 1

To Each Our Own Narrative

You Meet the Most Interesting People at ...

On a recent Saturday, I (TLB) attended an event on the northwest side of Chicago, at the Norwood Park community center. It was difficult to get there because some of the Blue Line track was being repaired; we had to take a shuttle to get to the last station. After the event, I went to the local branch of the public library for a couple of hours to work. At about 4:45 PM I used the library wi-fi to check my Google Maps information. A bus was due to come in a few minutes down the Northwest Highway, headed in the direction of the Loop.

I found the bus stop without difficulty, just where the librarian told me - right in front of the U.S. Bank. There was a young man also waiting. He looked barely eighteen, certainly not over twenty-two. He asked me for a cigarette. I told him that I do not smoke. Perhaps in order to avoid a lecture about the evils of tobacco, he told me, "Good, I hope you stay that way." We both smiled; I felt a connection.

He opened up a little about himself. He was a cook; well, an apprentice cook. He added that it was not in a fancy restaurant, just "a regular place." He was worried that he was supposed to be at work by 5:00 PM, and he had already waited about a half an hour. I told him that I had just checked the schedule on Google Maps and that the bus should have passed a couple of minutes ago. He used his smartphone to check with the CTA site and it stated, "no bus service available."

He told me he was going to call an Uber. I knew I could catch the El train close to his restaurant (and take that all the way home), so I told him I could split the cost of the Uber. He opened up a little more, expressing his enthusiasm for his newfound profession, and hopes that someday he could be a chef in a fancy restaurant like the Palmer House, Chicago's mark of hotel elegance. The Uber arrived shortly, and the ride lasted for only a few minutes. I was hoping that he would tell me more of his backstory.

Having taught young adults at a community college for three decades means that I have had thousands of students: cases in which I could see different trajectories to adulthood. So, I could not help imagining the different possible scenarios that had brought this young man to that bus stop on this day. Perhaps he was a newly independent adult, aging out of foster care. Perhaps his previous career had been in some illegal activity. Perhaps a previous identity had been that of a convict or a patient in a rehab center. These different pasts were all possible, and seemed more likely than his being the scion of one of the families residing in the tidy brick homes around Norwood Park. But I was to hear no more of his past - he was more interested in the screen of his smartphone. We had already spoken enough for me to discern his core life narrative.

We got out of the Uber a few minutes after 5:00 PM. He extended a hand for a fist bump and I wished him well before heading into the crosswalk to get to the El station. I don't know if his boss chewed him out for being late. I don't know about his skills and opportunities relating to culinary arts. I don't know if he will end up as a mechanic, plumber, welder, or paramedic, or even the expert chef that he currently aspires to be, but I am predicting some success, eventually, in the career sphere. I have inferred this by the direction of his narrative.

His narrative went beyond a mere description of his present state: "I'm late for my job as a cook." His narrative had a vision of the future that he found most attractive and motivating - to be a chef in an elegant restaurant. He also expressed focus, problem solving, and commitment. He responded to that boring wait for the bus not by playing video games on his smartphone, but by focusing on how he could get to work on time (e.g., checking the CTA schedule, summoning an Uber). His dedication was such that he ordered that ten-dollar Uber ride even before I told him I would chip in.

But his brief narrative was even more revealing for what it did not contain - self-pity. I have spent enough time at bus stops and airline terminals to have heard a myriad of inconvenienced and frustrated commuters unload narratives of victimhood, not just on inefficient and uncaring transportation companies, but also on the vast political and economic "unjust system." Perhaps more frequent than any of these rants are the complaints about unsupportive families. I suspect that if I had engaged these same whining individuals at a time when the transportation was running smoothly, they would find something else to complain about.

The major contentions of this book are:

1. Although our past experiences help shape our present narrative of life, it is that very present narrative that interprets those past experiences
2. Our present narrative will create our future reality
3. In order to have a better future reality, we must develop a better present narrative

The Narrating Species

Every species must interact with its own internal drives and external environment in order to meet the needs imposed by life. Other species have some capacity for memory and planned actions incorporating strategies, but humans appear to have a degree of reflection that goes beyond this. Humans are the species that narrates life while living it.

A narrative is a storied form of interpreting and planning by which individuals, families, groups, organizations, and societies understand themselves and their place in the world. Narratives interact with all those topics that psychologists are prone to specialize in - attitudes, emotions, moods, personality traits, roles, and even abilities. A change in any of these may call for an adjustment in the corresponding narrative. Conversely, a change in narrative can impact attitudes, emotions, moods, personality traits, roles, and even abilities. Narratives are the link between individual personality and broader social phenomena such as political attitudes and religious doctrines (and perhaps even scientific paradigms).

Because language is such an important part of both human communication and cognition, language is the form in which these stories are usually portrayed. Some people are quite verbally articulate, even eloquent. They can put their narrative into words by telling their life story with much literary flair. Other individuals might present a detailed description of their present condition, replete with goals, obstacles, and tactics. Yet other individuals can convey their aspirations for the future, a different aspect of a narrative. But many individuals cannot put much of their underlying narrative into words, at least words that convey with clarity in some form of communication with others. For these persons, the narrative is not absent, only inarticulate. In these cases, the narrative of such an individual must be inferred from an observation of that person's behavior.

Human consciousness is both internal and external. Internally, the mind is aware of motives.

Externally, the senses allow the mind to perceive stimuli from the environment when those stimuli pose an opportunity for (or threat to) those motives. Most of us are largely conscious of most aspects of our own narratives. When a narrative is largely unconscious, the danger is that it will guide an individual in a way that proves dysfunctional to what should be the stated goals and most effective means of achieving those goals. Becoming more self-aware of our narratives is the first step to a better life, especially if that includes improving the narrative.

Narratives are key identifiers. If I ask, "Who are you"? your answer selects from an almost infinite number of identifiers. Which identifiers are selected are those most relevant to the dominant narrative. Situational factors (roles) can influence which narrative or sub-narrative is employed.

Psychologists study the *who* of a person as a complex combination of factors, including personality, upbringing, career choice, socioeconomic status, family status, interests, and other descriptors which interact and affect one another. McAdams, Josselson, and Leiblich (2006), reflected that many college and university professors who are actively involved in research regard their scholarly work as an important part of their identity. Autobiographies of natural scientists, social scientists, and scholars in the humanities often trace the development of interest in a given academic field and may describe how that interest affected their personal lives (e.g., Loevinger, 2002; Sarason, 1998).

Adam is an accountant, and when asked, "Who are you?" he answers, "I am an accountant" (his career is his main identifier, at least in this interaction with the person who asked him).

Kayla is a fifteen-year-old girl coming to terms with her budding sexuality. When asked, "Who are you?" she often answers, "I am a lesbian" (for this may be the main fact defining her most important relationships at this juncture in her life). Perhaps in ten years, Kayla will have passed the CPA exam, and also give Adam's answer, "an accountant." She may even be married to another woman at that time, but perhaps the career will become a more prominent identifier of her life.

Taylor grew up in the foster system, and never had a steady home. Since becoming an adult, she has found a good job and bought her own home. When asked, "Who are you?" she does not answer that she is a nurse, but "I am a strong woman who takes care of herself." Her narrative reflects not so

much of her career accomplishments, but what those say about the person behind those accomplishments.

The question, "Who are you?" is simple, but can reveal much about the narrative a person holds. Although narratives are ever shifting as roles change throughout life, the narrative is a view into a person's impression of the self's place and purpose in society.

If life is but a play, a narrative is a plot in which the narrator is the actor, the author, and the director. The purpose of the narrative is to buffer, and connect, the values (to which an individual is committed) and the interpretation of the individual's context within the world. The narrative is both a guide to action as well as a justification for that action (and perhaps even an excuse for the failure of such actions). The healthier the narrative, the more it guides the individual to successful actions rather than excusing ineffective actions (or justifying evil actions).

Ellen is what her friends refer to as a "mentally balanced" person. (She would score low on any psychometric assessment of neuroticism.) As a teenager she was very quiet, leading to some tough interactions with her peers and even some teachers. At that previous point in her life, her narrative seemed self-defeating: *The way I am is wrong. I need to change to fit in.* However, the more she tried to fit in, the less at ease and the more inauthentic she felt. She had not discovered proper roles for her interaction with the external world. As actor, director, and author of her life, she was in control of her actions, but in trying to force fit herself with the values of her peers, she was not acting in a way that was genuine to her, and as a result, her actions were not successfully leading her towards desirable outcomes; her grades suffered, and this made her feel less happy.

In her early twenties, Ellen decided to embark on a journey of discovering her true self. She had taken a few jobs, but none had seemed like a correct fit. She also felt that the people surrounding her, while considered friends, were not people she was entirely comfortable around. You could say that she disliked the plot of her life and made the (director's) decision to change it. In other words, her narrative was: *I am not connected to the world in a way that suits me, but I want to discover where that connection is.* The arc of her story changed: the next scene will be that of exploration.

When Ellen began this process, she started at a basic level of learning what her values are. She wrote down all of the things that interested her and discovered that her passion seems to lie mostly in the area of animals. She volunteered at an animal shelter for a couple of months and discovered that

her life fit into place. Her values strongly pulled her towards helping animals. At this point, her narrative became: *I must work to make my life fit the values that I have discovered*: *I am the champion of animals.*

Ellen decided to go back to school to work towards becoming a veterinary assistant. She met people there who had similar values, immediately making some new friends, while drifting away from her former associates, with whom she shared fewer elements of her evolving narrative.

Narratives also interact with our abilities, aptitudes, even skill sets. As our skills improve, we recognize that goals may now be more accessible. If there is a decrease in skills, we may consider that to be a new obstacle in the pursuit of goals. Either of these could occasion the reformulation of our life narrative.

Blake and Stephen work at an IT company. They worked hard to get their jobs and have both been promoted to higher levels. On one level, they have a similar narrative when it comes to career: *I have the goal of climbing the company ladder and eventually starting my own business*. As the men rise in position at the company, they are required to take training courses to learn new skills.

Blake is able to learn these skills quickly and with ease, and the company is very happy with him. As he learns each new skill, he gains more confidence, and his narrative develops along the lines of: *If I continue on this path, I will soon achieve my goal*. Over the next five years, Blake climbs his way to a prominent position in the company and has learned all he needs to leave and start his own business. However, he has grown so happy in this company that he decides to stay and continue to climb the ladder. His new narrative becomes: *My skills have improved to the level that I could achieve more by remaining with this company than by trying to start my own.* Blake has not failed, given up, or sold out. His narrative has simply continued to develop, shaped by his changing abilities and career environment (and perhaps by changes in other areas of his life). In the case of Blake, his skills and narrative have communicated back and forth resulting in a dynamic interaction. As his skills have improved, his narrative has become one of confidence; as this level of confidence in his narrative has grown, he has become quicker at mastering the skills necessary for his further advancement. Blake's goal becomes: *I am aiming to become the CEO of this company.*

Although Stephen learns well at first, he soon realizes that he has more trouble than Blake with these new skills. He prefers to stick to older methods

that he is familiar with. As he begins to lag in his professional development and the company, his boss begins to put pressure on him to perform at a higher level. Stephen becomes stressed, and as a result, has an even more difficult time in his job performance. As this continues, Stephen's narrative changes from his original goal of starting his own business to: *I can't even perform well at a regular job.* As time continues and this pattern remains, Stephen becomes depressed as he finds his confidence slipping further down. As a result, he finds himself less able to learn new skills when required. His performance level is decreasing rapidly and with it his skills. As time passes, Stephen asks to take a step down in the company. His narrative is now: *The pressure of starting my own business would be too much for me. I'm OK with this new role because it will allow more time for my family.*

Let us not be too quick to judge Stephen as a failure. True, he has settled for less than his original career goals, but we must also ask if his developed narrative involves a more realistic assessment of his aptitudes, and if it facilitates some of the newer (non-career) roles that he has taken on since launching his career.

Neither man hit his original target of owning his own IT company. As the skill set of Blake improved, his narrative changed to include a different, higher career goal, and as the skill set of Stephen came up short, his narrative changed to include a lesser career goal. Both men are satisfied with their new positions. What we have here is more than a mere recalibration of the career path, but a successful re-authoring of the underlying narrative.

Facts and Inferences

We can only understand facts and values when contextualized. Because different people live in different contexts, their understandings of values (or even facts) will differ, even when we are talking about transcendent values and objective facts.

Since narratives connect feelings (emotions), facts, values, and logic, narratives interact with both facts and values. New facts may deflect the course of a developing narrative, but more often, a narrative searches for facts consistent with the previously accepted narrative and rejects those facts inconsistent with the narrative.

Narrative is the ongoing dance between our commitment to the pursuit, maintenance, and defense of our values and understanding of external (social

and physical) reality. In this dance, values take the lead, and our understanding of the facts must walk backwards in high heels, trying to do it gracefully (or at least, not stumbling). The narrative provides the choreography to synchronize the movements of these partners (facts and values).

Here the work of social psychologist Leon Festinger (1957) is a classic to be re-read. He found that people whose values and behavior were consistent with an old narrative would tend to disbelieve any new piece of information inconsistent with that narrative. The new facts were not as important as the old values and current behaviors. Festinger labeled this phenomenon *cognitive dissonance*.

For example, cigarette smokers get addicted to nicotine and then it is difficult for them to overcome this addiction and break the habit of smoking. In 1954 when a Surgeon General's report noted higher rates of lung cancer among smokers, about half of U.S. adults were quick to assume a causal link, while others were more skeptical, and suggested that the "link" may be something more spurious: "perhaps nervous people smoke more, and it is the nervousness that causes the cancer." What Festinger found out was that smokers were more likely to come up with the latter explanation because it denied the danger of cigarettes. It is not that these people began by believing cigarettes to be safe, so they took up smoking; these smokers could not accept the new data because of the inconsistency with present behavior (smoking) to which they had become addicted. For the smokers, denying the information about lung cancer was easier than denying one's addicted body another cigarette.

So, even though most people still say that they would change their beliefs when new facts arise, experiments have consistently demonstrated otherwise - people resist accepting facts that contradict the behaviors to which they are addicted and the values to which they are committed.

A related phenomenon is that most people only seek out facts confirming current narratives. Conversely, most people resist those facts inconsistent with current narratives.

This is called *confirmation bias* and it lies at the heart of many stereotypes and prejudices. We notice whatever information fits neatly into a generalization and manage to ignore or explain away those cases that do not.

For example, Jacob is not a full-fledged homophobe, but his toleration of LGBTQ has its limits. He has many stereotypical ideas about gay behavior, especially career choice. He once blurted out, "All gays are hairdressers and

any guy who becomes a beautician must be gay." Every narrative cherry picks the facts that conveniently substantiate it (and this is particularly true for narratives embracing prejudicial stereotypes). Jacob can easily point to examples fitting this conclusion. "My second wife had this guy who was her favorite hairdresser, Mr. Alan, and he was as swishy as they come." Whenever Jacob noticed a guy who was a steelworker or logger, Jacob would muse that when more men had those kinds of jobs, there were a lot fewer gays around (almost implying that one's occupational options guided people's sexual orientation). When I pointed out to Jacob that I knew several heterosexual men who were hairdressers, including a firefighter and a retired boxer, I got an explanation: "Well, those firefighters have a lot of time off, and so they start these businesses on the side, like a barber shop or beauty shop where they can hire other people to do most of the work. Being a firefighter is his main job, and that's heterosexual enough for me." I then pointed out that I knew several firefighters who were gay, but Jacob had an answer for that too: "It's because of the affirmative action and political correctness. The department might have to meet a certain quota to avoid a federal suit." Jacob was very committed to this stereotype and it would not be dispelled by any facts I could muster. Especially when those facts are seen as coming from others not sharing the narrative, the facts are ignored or rejected in anger or fear.

It is our narrative that allows us to understand our environment and make inferences from our observations of that environment. Narratives do more than define ourselves, but are the hermeneutics we use to understand the environment in which we find ourselves. The narrative translates our environment into a map of perceived tools and obstacles, according to the currently salient goals.

Narratives influence anything requiring inference from observations to (cognitive) meaning or relevance: scientific theories, technological plans, religious doctrines, myths, ethics. As the narrative changes, so will the inferences that are made, even given the same environment and the same observations of that environment. We recreate our narratives daily, perhaps from moment to moment. We constantly redefine who we are by reinterpreting our past and redirecting our path to the future.

Elizabeth has a series of narratives throughout the day, ranging from the light to the serious. It begins with the morning narrative of: *I don't feel good when my alarm goes off and I have to get out of bed. I enjoy sleeping. I really hate waking up*. As she continues on to her daily routine of visiting a

coffee shop for a latte while she reads the materials she will need to use at work that day, her naturally observant self leads her to watch others and make inferences about them. Her narrative is: *I am an observant and curious person and love to people-watch*.

These examples are those of her thoughts of the moment. She is not making future plans but is responding to the stimuli of the present time. Once she gets to work, this changes. She is a techie and must spend much of her day engrossed in analyzing computer networking challenges. Her narrative at this point is: *I keep abreast of the latest technologies, improve them, and work well within a team to do a good job*.

As she leaves work, Elizabeth listens to news on the radio in order to catch up with what has been happening in the rest of the world while she has been at work. She has a keen interest in politics and likes to stay updated on what the political figures have been doing and saying. At this point, Elizabeth's narrative is: *I am in tune with my moral system, and use politics as a way of keeping my life and environment aligned with those morals.*

On Sundays, Elizabeth attends church. It is here that she communicates with what she considers to be her ultimate relevance. Here lie Elizabeth's deepest thoughts about the world and what is beyond. Her narrative becomes: *My religion is of utmost importance. Every part of my life holds some importance but this is where I discover the core of who I am.*

If we are to speak of Elizabeth's core narrative, it must be a narrative that encompasses all of her daily variations of that narrative. That is the task of us scholars and mental health professionals who seek to study narratives. Another task is to discern the interaction between narratives and situation - when do the stimuli and situation shape the narrative and when is the narrative in the driver's seat interpreting, even shaping, that situation?

Because narratives can, do, and should change, our initial assumptions about ourselves and the world should be regarded as reflecting our own limited perspectives, and should not be given the status of self-evident truths.

All Narratives Are Not Equal

Everyone has a narrative, though perhaps implicit, but all narratives are not equally defensible. Some narratives are better than others, insofar as they do a better job of realizing our most important values.

The remaining chapters distinguish between healthy narratives and dead-end narratives that lead nowhere, but only bring us to wallow in self-pity. The challenge is to develop *resilience*, an ability to look beyond the present heartache and embrace a possible (but yet improbable) future. In order to do this, you must develop a narrative in which you are the champion of this future that you will create, not the victim of the past that created you.

Chapter 2

Values: What Really Matters?

This chapter affirms that humans are values-driven. Narratives express and guide those values. Narratives that do not acknowledge, express, and distinguish between those values become dead-end narratives.

Dead-End Narrative: Nihilism

Everyone has a narrative; however, not all narratives are equal. Let's illustrate this by taking one of the worst narratives a human may embrace - nihilism.

The word is based on its Latin root *nihil* (nothing). In its various forms nihilism has argued that:

- Nothing is real (Ontological Nihilism)
- No knowledge is provable (Epistemological Nihilism)
- No laws are justified (Anarchism)
- No authority is legitimate (Anarchism)
- No scientific evidence is sufficient (Skepticism)
- Nothing is beautiful (Dadaism)
- No understanding is superior (Postmodernism)
- No morality is absolute (Moral Relativism)
- Nothing is true
- Nothing is of value

College students taking their first class in philosophy, ethics, or theology are often amazed when they realize the power of the paradox in refuting such positions. "If nihilism says that nothing is true, then nihilism cannot be true."

Consider the following theoretical exchange between a nihilist, and his truth-affirming opponent (let's call him Socrates).

Socrates: Is there any truth you embrace?
Nihilist: No.
Socrates: Is what you are saying true?
Nihilist: Yes.
Socrates: Is that a contradiction?
Nihilist: Yes.
Socrates: Does that logical inconsistency bother you?
Nihilist: No.
Socrates: Why not?
Nihilist: Because nothing matters.

To use our terminology, the logical contradiction comes from saying that "we should go through life without a guiding narrative" is itself a guiding narrative.

Our focus in this chapter will be on the last form of nihilism in the aforementioned list - that nothing is of value. But let's get beyond the clever refutation by paradox and ask the deeper question: what does it mean to commit oneself to go through life rejecting the possibility of embracing any standard of values? Such a narrative is a deadend because it does not lead the individual to a fulfilling life, nor does it facilitate social stability.

Even if we assume no afterlife in heaven, and no previous life prior to our present form, we are alive in the middle part of this eternity and have the opportunity to create a guiding narrative. So, the nihilist is doing more than denying the forelife (perhaps in another body) and the afterlife (in some spiritual paradise). The thorough nihilist is also denying the value of living in the momentary existence the individual does have. The past life doesn't matter. The hereafter doesn't matter. The present doesn't matter. Nothing matters. No commitments to anything can be justified.

In practice, it is as difficult to be a thoroughly committed nihilist as it is to be a religious ascetic (but at least the latter has lofty ideals to bolster the commitment). So, most nihilists back off from this extreme position and embrace living in the now (and usually its concurrent bodily pleasures), and selectively employ nihilism to reject the morality that might limit their hedonism.

We take the position that it is difficult, if not impossible, to live life without a narrative (religious or otherwise). Holding anything to be important (or accepting nothing as important) expresses a narrative (perhaps an implicit one). Let's take an extreme form of existential nihilism. The

narrative would be that the self has appeared into existence and shall, at some point, disappear from existence. In between, nothing is of real importance. This is summed up by a great critic of nihilism, Jordan Peterson (2018): "If existence, life, and the universe are ultimately meaningless, what difference does it make how we live, what we choose, and who we become?" The nihilist has made a choice to live by this statement, and has therefore chosen a life narrative. Even if we assume that somebody who does not accept any meaningfulness of life may nonetheless enjoy daily activities or have some long-term lifetime goals, this certainly complicates the nihilistic narrative.

We could expect those goals to be taken on with different expectations than those of a person who embraces meaning. A life narrative that factors in an afterlife is likely to impact actions in the present lifetime. We could expect to see the existential nihilist living more in the moment and any enthusiasm would be for the concrete and observable rather than that unproven by empirical science. The overall life narrative of a nihilist would be that their life is incidental - they currently exist, and they will exist in it as they choose to until they cease existence. Such a person will not necessarily be depressed. Indeed, many people find relief in the concept - a release from blame or obligation.

Louisa is such a person. Her life narrative is that she came into existence, that her life has no real transcendent purpose, and that one day she will be gone. She finds this lack of a spiritual tether to be freeing from the rules and regulations that come with religions. She aims to enjoy life while it exists for her, and she does. She takes part in martial arts, travel, painting, and other activities that please her senses. She understands that one day she will be old, and she wants to be comfortable and have a happy existence at that point, so she worked hard in college to get a good job. There clearly was some satisfaction and long-term motivation to this process, but none of these would she acknowledge as having ultimate importance. You could say that this points towards somewhat of a 'live in the moment' narrative, with sensible planning towards her potential future earthly existence.

Louisa has two children, now aged three and five. Her life narrative does not prevent her from having children, or even enjoying the time she spends with them. She teaches her children to enjoy their senses as she does with hers and to explore the world they exist in.

This particular life narrative is not something that Louisa generally discusses with people, as it's even not something that often crosses her mind.

For this reason, she has never discussed it with her children, perhaps because these preschoolers are still too young, perhaps because Louisa has not worked through the ramifications of her narrative in her own mind. The children are free to learn about other narratives and adopt another if they choose, but perhaps that is true of all of us, insofar as we end up choosing to embrace our parents' narratives, or reject those narratives. It is our choice, whether or not our parents acknowledge that it is our choice. The difference between Louisa and most parents is that it matters to the latter if their children respect the parental narrative. Louisa, if she is a true nihilist seeing no predominant value to anything in life, should not get upset if her children choose to reject her life narrative and join a fundamentalist church.

Louisa accepts that her own existence (as well as that of her children) is but a matter of happenstance. She is not curious about how science may explain the "how" of it, and she is not troubled that she cannot explain the "why" of it. She will not pass up the opportunity to enjoy what is here and now. She wants to experience the emotions of happiness, excitement, and pleasure. She could also choose to experience regret, shame, and disappointment (or perhaps his nihilism has given a foundation for not experiencing these emotions). The difference to her, and her overriding life narrative, is in how she chooses to experience what is here while she is here. But, if she makes a choice to experience certain emotions, and not others, doesn't that preference indicate a value?

So, there is an implicit narrative for Louisa, one that she has embraced, though perhaps denied. There are values in her life, at least in the form of guiding principles. Though she might intellectually deny such values, her life is yet guided by them. Her narrative has not prevented her from daily pleasures, including those of parenthood, but does it preclude her from embracing the profundity of parenthood? Is she refusing to see the relevance of her life and her role in the lives of others from the elevated perspective provided by a spiritual dimension? Or shall we credit her with a more clear-headed view, free from the delusional pretentions that most of us have embraced?

It is our position that some things do matter, and therefore that nihilism is a dead-end narrative. Here we are talking about all sorts of things that matter: material things, spiritual things, even foolish things (the utilitarian, the ultimate and the ulterior forms of relevance, respectively). Things have value to us when they are relevant to us (or maybe you could say that things are relevant when they express, facilitate or threaten a certain value we have

acknowledged). Not all things are equally relevant. Some things are more relevant than others: they have greater value, they matter more.

In the case of Louisa, though she would say that her position is that nothing ultimately matters, she would be upset if she was not able to attend her martial arts classes, annoyed if she got stuck in traffic, and devastated if one of her children passed away. This effectively rules out the position of 'nothing matters' which is central to existential nihilism. A true existential nihilist would take each moment as fleeting and not be bothered by any of these situations.

Utilitarian Relevance

The most obvious things that matter to us as embodied beings (and thinking animals) are those things that directly and immediately provide us with a sensory perception. These are things that will grab the body's attention because they bring the body pleasure or pain, or maybe even a threat to survival.

- This stove burner is too hot (for me to keep my hand on it)
- This room is chilly (so I'll look for a sweater)
- That sliver hurts (so I hope I find the tweezers)
- I scraped my knee (so I'm looking for disinfectant)
- The sun is too bright (so I'll put on the sunglasses)
- The radio is too loud (please turn it down)
- I'm hungry (can we go eat?)
- I'm tired (I think I'll turn in the for night)
- I'm thirsty (do you have any cold water?)

Notice how each of the above examples brings some degree of suffering (if not a threat to survival) to the body. Also notice how each of these implies an intended action to meet the need (or even a request for help).

Utilitarian relevance is what we call such values. That which has utilitarian relevance provides utility with respect to suffering or survival, health or wealth, convenience, or comfort. We could not begin to count, let alone notice, all the things that fall into this category every day of our lives. Before you make it to the breakfast table, you rely upon the utility of so

many things, from things that go in the body (medicine, vitamins, caffeine) to things that go on the body (soap, creams, clothes), with each fitting into one of the aforementioned categories, especially comfort, convenience, or health.

The importance of utilitarian relevance is acknowledged by all psychologists. Despite his spiritual interests, Abraham Maslow (1954) gave the highest priority to the body's needs. The very base of his pyramid of human motivators was the *physiological*: hunger, thirst, sleep, breathing, elimination, temperature maintenance, and pain avoidance. After those needs are taken care of, the next level would be the *safety* needs (also concerned with the body's survival).
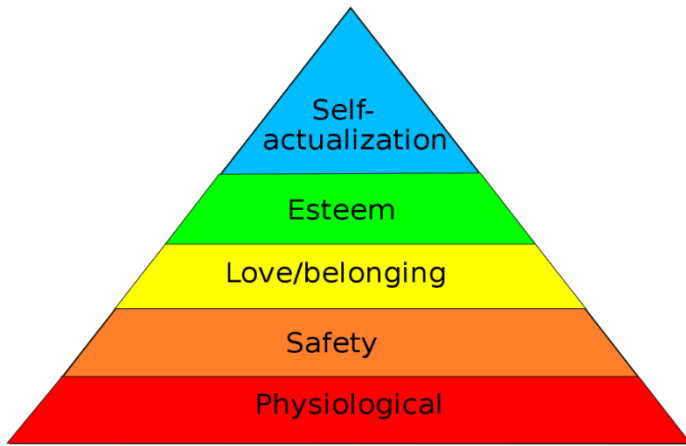
One of the problems of the market economy is that some advertisements portray material goods as if they were able to meet higher level needs of belonging, esteem, or even self-actualization. In reality, such material goods are appropriate only for the material needs of the lowest levels - physiological and safety needs.

Robert is fairly new to the workforce. He has completed a master's degree in business and has a well-paying job for somebody his age. He has been able to rent a nice, but small, apartment in a gentrified neighborhood of a world-class city. He has a new sports car (with high insurance and garage fees) but usually relies upon a taxi or rideshare because it is just so much more convenient. Robert has outfitted his unit with modern furniture, appliances, and gadgets. Although he bought a high-end refrigerator and

oven, he rarely uses them – he has enough disposable income to eat at restaurants or order take-out regularly.

Robert feels like he has made it in life (or at least he got a fast start in the rat race). His current narrative is that life's purpose is found in material goods and finance. It must be because those things are making him feel good. His job has given him the finances to allow for the material goods that make him feel successful. Because he works many hours at his job, he does not spend much time with friends, and he does not develop himself in other ways. His job remains his primary means, just as amassing material things remain his primary ends.

A few years later, Robert meets a woman and falls in love, and they get married. Shortly after, they have two children. Robert's small apartment is no longer adequate for his needs. He and his wife now have a decision to make. They could find a bigger apartment in the city, but Robert is not making enough money for this kind of jump. They could move to the suburbs, but then Robert must either commute each day or find a job closer to their new home. Whichever of these options are chosen, they are in a tough spot because Robert has been renting for years, and in spending all of his salary on disposable goods and pricey experiences, he has not saved much of what he has earned, making a down payment difficult.

Let's look at another route that Robert could have taken. Robert graduates with his master's degree and gets a well-paying job in the city. He realizes that, although he is making good money for a person of his age, money is not the end, only a means (and not always an effective one at that). The money itself can purchase food, shelter, and furniture, but these are at the physiological level and only supply basic needs.

Because Robert wants to achieve the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy, he chooses to use his salary wisely. He takes out a mortgage on a simple condo in a decent location close to his work (so he can do without a car), accepts hand-me-down furniture even though it is mismatched, goes running instead of paying for a gym membership, and cooks healthy food at home. He has now secured the second level of Maslow's hierarchy by taking care of his health and safety needs. Because Robert recognizes that he won't be solely fulfilled by work and finances, he makes an effort to make friends at work, and spends some leisure time with them. Eventually, he meets his wife and they have their two children. He has now reached the love and belonging level of Maslow's hierarchy.

By the time Robert meets his wife, he has saved a good amount of money, and because he purchased a condo rather than rented, he is now able to sell the unit to cover the down payment on a more appropriate living environment. They decide to move to the suburbs, putting a slower and more relaxed pace of life above a higher salary. Robert has worked hard at his job for a few years now, and has no problem being transferred to his new location. In achieving respect and some amount of seniority at work, the respect of his wife for having given them a secure future, and the freedom of choice, he has achieved the esteem level of Maslow's hierarchy. In the future, he can move on to self-actualization.

We see in Robert's realm of possibilities two different narratives, pointing to two different intersections between types of relevance and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In the first example, Robert favored the lowest levels of Maslow's hierarchy and ignored the higher levels. From a Maslowian perspective, the best outcome appears when the levels become mutually supportive. Only utilitarian relevance should be assigned to Maslow's lowest levels, and we are left with the question of what kind of relevance pertains to the highest levels.

Was the first plausible narrative we illustrated for Robert ("spend and enjoy it now") necessarily inferior to the second (more long-term, family-oriented) narrative? Can we say that a hedonistic life (focused on only the first level of Maslow's pyramid) is always a dead-end narrative? If we take Maslow's pyramid only as a *descriptive* generalization ("this is the way most people behave most of the time - they worry about eating before they worry about self-esteem") then let there be no moralizing (no shoulds, no oughts, no supposed to's) coming from us. On the other hand, if we take Maslow's pyramid as a guide to the ideal life ("after you take care of your lower needs, you *should* turn your attention to the higher-level goals") we are using our index fingers to point Robert and Louisa in a certain direction, and perhaps waggling those fingers at the people who are slow in moving toward those higher goals. Did you catch the value-laden implication of that word, *higher*? Yes, we are saying that certain values (and their corresponding narratives) are better than others.

We advocate this latter, normative, use of Maslow's pyramid, and therefore we are identifying the hedonism of Robert and Louisa as narratives of limited value. Robert may get stuck in his fancy rented apartment and may never move on to enjoy the possibility of a family. Louisa may never realize the fullness of the potential of her motherhood role.

Although hedonism is certainly limiting, it is not as intellectually indefensible as nihilism. Hedonism does not rely upon such an obvious logical fallacy. But to mount a logical defense, hedonism devolves into the *ad hoc* fallacy of relying upon a definition so broad that it can fit any situation. This is evident in the comeback that most hedonists have when someone criticizes their choices for momentary or bodily pleasures: "Well, you may be saving money for a home in the suburbs, but that is just because you think it will give you more pleasure later on, so you are just as much of a hedonist as I am. We are just pursuing different pleasures."

Using that logic means that Mother Teresa (now officially St. Teresa of Calcutta) was a hedonist because working with the poor gave her so much pleasure. It must have, says the hedonist, since she would not have spent her time doing that if it had not been pleasurable for her. We know that it was "fun" because all people do what is fun, and that is what she did, so it must have been fun (at least for her).

While we find such reasoning little more than a tautology, let's give utilitarian relevance its due.

As long as you are alive, you are in a physical body, and must concern yourself with these aspects of utilitarian relevance. Values of health and wealth, comfort, and convenience, suffering and survival must be part of your narrative. But is that the whole story of your life - a consumer of useful stuff? Becoming more effective and efficient in our use of these material things should be one of our life goals, but should it be the only one? Or even the main one? Should we also strive to become responsible consumers, obligated to help fellow humans, other species, the planet itself, perhaps honor all of Creation (and maybe even a Creator)?

Ultimate Relevance

Ultimate relevance is all about seeking a grander purpose beyond the perils, plights, and prizes of daily life's attempts to satisfy the needs of the body. If we return to Maslow's pyramid, we might gain some insight or inspiration about what things might be at the top. The bottom two levels (*physiological* and *safety*) must be attended to first and are concerned with the body's survival (and/or comfort and pleasures). The next level (*love and belonging*) fit in with social stability, which has at least some utilitarian aspects. Then

comes *self-esteem,* which we regard as essential for mental health. But could that highest level of *self-actualization* be characterized as utilitarian?

Self-actualization was a term coined by one of Maslow's holistic mentors, neurologist Kurt Goldstein (1939), who understood it as a way that the individual could (and would and should) actualize whatever potentials that individual had. Jung (1979) had a similar concept of *individuation* in which the creative energies of the unconscious were harnessed to drive growth. The fact that Jung said individuation was to be attained in the later half of life, or that Maslow contended that the lower needs had priority in the sense that they had to be satisfied chronologically prior to self-actualization, should not be seen as diminishing its importance. Indeed, self-actualization should be seen as the long-term goal which the rest of life sustains.

The essence of self-actualization is creation. The self-actualizing individual continuously creates a self from the potential provided by the biological and social foundations. To wax theological, we are made in the image of God (the Creator) and therefore our essence is creativity. All the products that we have in the store, whether discovered in the natural world and/or manufactured in a factory, are merely created goods, and have only utilitarian relevance. What is *ultimately* relevant is not any created material product, but the creative process itself.

All utilitarian relevance involves things that have only instrumental value. That is, they are good because they can be used as means to attain other things (e.g., health, wealth, comfort, convenience). If my alarm clock no longer works, I throw it away. If I find a better alarm clock, I shall replace the one I have. My commitment to any material product is contingent upon its utility, its instrumental value. So, no material thing is ultimately relevant; not even my body, not human life itself. These are, sadly, too contingent. Life is a useful means to obtain many ends, but the mere extension of living time is not an end so worthy as to constitute the end to which all other ends must serve.

So, what is worthy of being regarded as having ultimate relevance? We have already explored hedonism's claim that pleasure is the greatest good, and found that wanting on several points. So, we cannot put pleasure on the pedestal of ultimate relevance.

The answer is obvious to the theist: God is ultimately relevant. Although there may be some evidence that religion brings social and health benefits, we should not focus on utilitarian relevance here. Worshiping God and other activities within the spiritual dimension do not always bear fruit in a material

sense, despite the assurance of televangelists who tell us that God will miraculously send wire transfers from heaven into our dollar-denominated earthly bank accounts.

John's parents separated soon after he was born. He lost touch with his father, who was in and out of prison. His mother became addicted to cocaine, supported this with prostitution, and was in and out of prison and rehab. John was effectively raised by a grandmother and an aunt. He was an angry young man, exhibiting severe problems both with male authority figures and in forming relationships with women. After an altercation with a police officer, John was on probation. After a conviction for burglary, he was incarcerated for a year. While in prison, he avoided the pressure to join a gang and sought the company of a born-again cohort of fundamentalist Christians. A local ministry helped him find a supportive community when he got out, and more importantly, male mentors. Between prayer meetings, Bible study, and choir practice, John is now at church three nights a week. He has been guided into a vocational program at the local community college (diesel mechanics) and he should be making good money in a few months. John finds that the church's doctrine provides the narrative he needs. "God forgave me for being a sinner, so I have forgiven my parents." Now, John has a new perspective for relating to male authority figures and for starting a possible future relationship with a woman, though he knows this is something that cannot be rushed.

Swiss philosopher Alain de Botton (2012) has articulated a doctrine that is the most thoughtful, and least hostile, that we have seen from the last two decades of contemporary atheism. Although he finds no attraction to the Christian doctrines that turned John's life around, and de Botton has only minimal connection with his own Jewish roots, he looks favorably on the need to explore that which is beyond the realm of material comfort. De Botton suggests that we look for ultimate relevance in art, love, and even work - all forms of creative endeavor. Another atheist thinker, Sam Harris (2014), has laid out a guide for morality and meditation beyond the constraints of formal religion.

Is it possible that the pursuit of ultimate relevance could also lead us into a dead-end narrative? We will see several examples of this in the next chapter on religion. Here let's just take the generic case of an inappropriate commitment to the pursuit of ultimate relevance. Persons who fall into this trap begin by this logic: if something is ultimately relevant, isn't it worthy of an absolute commitment? Yes, but what do we mean by absolute? Perhaps

this means that in a conflict between values, we choose the higher value. It should not mean that we will pursue the spiritual to the utter exclusion of the material.

Even in the strictest Catholic and Buddhist monasteries, where individuals remain cloistered from the temptations of the external world, someone is assigned tasks such as cooking dinner, washing clothes, and sweeping the floor. In its most extreme form, South Asian Jainism advocated the ideal of the ascetic who would refuse to walk on a path without first sweeping away the insects, and would wear a mask, lest he inadvertently step on or inhale an insect. Even Jain laity were forbidden to engage in agriculture, since spading the earth might slice a worm. In practice, most Jains were merchants who managed to negotiate for someone else to do the plowing and picking, and then earn extra merit by supporting the more extremely ascetic monks.

Without the support of such a religious community, such extreme asceticism must be regarded as a dead-end narrative denying utilitarian relevance - the legitimate concerns of every being for health and comfort. Though wealth and convenience certainly have only limited values, there is no virtue in unnecessarily forsaking them. Furthermore, we must condemn asceticism as an inauthentic spiritual quest - we do not necessarily succeed in the exploration of the higher realms by preventing ourselves from having any contact with the lower realms of life's needs.

So, how do we balance the utilitarian and ultimate concerns (body and spirit)? It is not so much a matter of Aristotelian moderation in each, but of alignment of these different values. Again, Maslow is quite helpful as a guide. Yes, take care of our physiological needs, but when that has been achieved, reasonably well, move on to the next level. It makes no sense to accumulate more food than you can eat, especially if it is a threat to your safety. Similarly, there is a limit to how many safety precautions you should be taking. After a certain point, living in constant lockdown for fear of disease or crime precludes the kind of interactions needed for Maslow's third level.

If we view Maslow's levels of needs as competing criteria to be satisfied, we can find a useful heuristic in the *satisficing* theories of Herbert Simon (1983). Decisions involving multiple criteria are complex and need to be made conjunctively. Start by listing all the criteria along with their relative weights. Then list the available alternatives along with the corresponding probabilities of achieving each of the criteria. Then eliminate

those alternatives that involve a major risk in meeting the most important criteria. This leaves us with those alternatives that satisfice: they are good enough, though not perfect. Above all, this conjunctive heuristic cautions us against holding out for a perfect solution on any one criterion, even the most important, if that threatens our ability to meet other criteria. The result of this process is that we end up with a "good enough" on all (or at least most) criteria rather than striving for solutions that are perfect on some criteria but have fatal flaws.

To put this in terms of narratives:

1. You need narratives and will invariably develop narratives. (So, avoid the dead-end narrative of nihilism).
2. You have a body, but don't make your narrative only about providing bodily pleasures. (So, avoid the limiting narrative of hedonism).
3. There is a spiritual aspect to life, worthy of exploration, but don't deny your physiological necessities. (So, avoid the dead-end narrative of asceticism.)

Well, that pretty much sums up the good life: get grounded in the spiritual, something beyond the mundane world, but don't forget that you still live in a body in that mundane world. Just avoid the extremes of both hedonism and asceticism. Caution. Carefully continue on with life. That sounds pretty simple, so why do people end up with such difficult emotional problems? The answer is that those people care too much about things that don't really matter.

Ulterior Relevance

That which is ulterior is something that is not clearly seen or apprehended, especially something that is concealed from us due to the deceit of another. Ever notice how some strangers appear to be friendly but actually have an ulterior motive of trying to win our confidence so that they might embezzle money from us? They have an ulterior motive. If we can recognize that hidden motive, we won't be deceived.

The biggest problem in developing a healthy narrative is not the ulterior motives of others, but that we ourselves are not aware of some of our

underlying motives. We are all too aware of our physiological and safety needs, but somewhere around the interpersonal and esteem levels, we start getting a little confused about what is really important. We would have a hard time justifying to an objective third party some of the foolish things we do. We might even have a hard time justifying it to our own reason, so we are afraid to acknowledge such values and they remain ulterior.

Here we are entering the realm of the irrational - what mental health professionals of a half century ago referred to as *neurotic*.

This entire process of decision making under ulterior relevance is distorted and dysfunctional. Within the realm of utilitarian relevance, a decision is wise to the extent that the individual utilizes the best available means according to the values of their predicted future outcomes. Within the realm of ultimate relevance, a decision is wise to the degree that it conforms to transcendent ethical guidelines. Within the realm of ulterior relevance, decisions cannot be referred to as wise, because they are merely compulsive reactions to forces beyond the individual's control.

Peter is in his early thirties. He still lives with his parents and hasn't dated in seven years. He hasn't gone out with a male friend in two years. A capable student in high school, he earned a scholarship to a top liberal arts college out of state. During the first semester, he quit because the food in the cafeteria was not compatible with his numerous food aversions, and he became fearful about the cleanliness of the bathrooms in his residence hall. Back at home he took some classes at the community college, earned a few "A" grades, but could not stick with a major because he could not be sure that it would lead to the proper career for him (which he is still unsure of). He tried getting a job in a restaurant and grocery store, but became worried about exposure to germs, and did not seem comfortable around other people. Last year, his father set him up with a job interview, but Peter decided not to go because of all the germs he would encounter on his journey, especially if he had to use a public restroom. He stopped going to church three years ago for the same reason. Now he has no friends, no degree, no job, no girlfriend, and no spiritual community. Peter's excessive concerns about germs could be clinically labeled as obsessive-compulsive disorder, but let's recognize that this rigid commitment to germ fears has led to a fluid commitment in the realms of education and career.

This unnecessary (and dysfunctional) rigidity characterizes most ulterior relevance. Consider the case of Johanna, whose presenting problem is that she is in a bad marriage. She and her husband argue often and are rarely

happy. Her husband does have his share of faults and those faults usually trigger the arguments, but Johanna's biggest fault is that she is stubborn. You could say that Johanna has a habit of 'cutting off her nose to spite her face.' One day, the argument lasts for a long time, but eventually the husband apologizes, suggesting they go to a restaurant they both like in order to reconnect. Johanna refuses. She knows that this little modicum of cooperation at this key point would end the argument, but she wants to prolong it further so that her husband will go to greater lengths to appease her.

If this were a calculated strategy to manipulate specific concessions from her spouse, we could attribute some utilitarian relevance to her stance: we would call her a shrewd negotiator. But the relevance motivating her is ulterior, serving no obvious practical purpose. She would rather be right (according to her own twisted logic) than enjoy the obvious benefits of a better relationship. She prides herself on her ability to outlast him in an argument, to wear him down with her superior self-control.

Johanna's happiness eventually reaches such a low point that she decides to attend counseling. Through talking with the psychotherapist, Johanna admits that she is often in a bad mood, which only exacerbates her stubbornness. After discussion with the psychotherapist, they decide that she will try a few strategies to bring her to a higher level of happiness. One simple strategy they discuss is reducing Johanna's consumption of coffee. The psychotherapist has discovered that Johanna drinks many cups a day, and wonders if a reduction could reduce her level of agitation. Johanna begins to reduce her consumption from six cups a day eventually down to zero. As she reduces her coffee consumption, her mood indeed improves and although she and her husband still argue, she is slower to anger and more likely to show a generally even temper.

In her openness to these recommendations, Johanna is displaying a different kind of commitment. Instead of the rigidity associated with ulterior relevance, we see the contingent commitment associated with utilitarian relevance: "I'll give it a try, and if it works, I'll stick with a decaffeinated beverage alternative."

Some years later, Johanna and her husband have built a much healthier marriage. They have been able to work through specific disputes with compassion and compromise. They have decided to start attending church together in order to bring spirituality into their life and bond them to a higher purpose in their quest for peace.

Now that Johanna is showing self-control, her dysfunctional stubbornness has been reduced, supplanted by an openness to explore the spiritual. Perhaps she will find more things in life worthy of a firm commitment.

Another symptom of ulterior relevance could be the opposite of rigidity of commitment - the absence of any functional or enduring commitment. Such fluidity can be found in patients who fail to commit to a course of action.

Freud (1974) understood the *ego* as the part of the mind charged with dealing with external reality (what we would call utilitarian relevance). The ego has to figure out what courses of action (behaviors) are worthy of the contingent commitment to attain specific instrumental values (e.g., how to get food, money, a job). But, in order for the ego to navigate around the external world, it has to maintain some balance within the internal world: the conflict between the *id* (the sexual and aggressive drives) and the *superego* (the conscience). If there is an unstable conflict of these two components, the individual's behavior will lurch from under-control (the expression of sex and aggression) to over-control (repression by a harsh conscience).

Such an emotional roller coaster is an impossible burden. One defense mechanism is *projection,* in which the individual denies this problem within herself, but sees it as being the problem that the other people bring to the relationship. This projected indignation is a dead-end narrative, wholly within the realm of ulterior relevance. Indignation is neither a guide for utilitarian relevance (what best serves our health or wealth) nor for ultimate relevance (what is moral or pleasing to God). Unfortunately, indignation can lead to violence and exploitation directed at others.

We can look at the case of Sophia to see an example of what can happen when indignation is allowed to run without the balancing of utilitarian or ultimate relevance. Sophia feels angry and resentful often. Freud would say that the indignation she feels toward others is a projection of the (self) condemnation she feels coming from her own superego. It is so harsh that she must throw it on to someone else. During these moments, she identifies with her superego, and becomes the righteous moralist, condemning a world that isn't fair and individuals that are not kind. To others, this makes her appear to be a know-it-all and somewhat aloof and unapproachable, but what is more important is that she has justified herself to herself: *I'm OK, it's the world that is all wrong.* It is her narrative that people aren't nice to her, but in their narratives, she is aloof.

This perceived hostility results in Sophia spending a lot of time alone. People may "misregulate and worsen their bad mood if they spend their solitary time brooding" (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Sophia's cycle only deepens as her alone time puts her into a worse mood, which encourages her to act more superior in order to fulfill the wishes that give ulterior relevance. As Freud could have pointed out, this is not a conscious choice (made by a healthy functioning ego) but a vicious cycle is driven by Sophia's dead-end narrative.

Sophia takes the subway to work, and in her quest to feel superior, desires a seat on the train. When she is not offered one by a man, she becomes angry, which shows in her face. The man at the newspaper stand then acts curtly towards her, which only enhances her narrative. When she gets to work, she is in a really bad mood, and in her mind she has been judged and treated badly by others. Her narrative leads her to overcompensate in order for her to continue the feeling of superiority, and she becomes bossy to her colleagues.

Sophia is an example of the dead-end narrative of indignation justifying mild aggression towards others, a hostile response, leading to more indignation. But the toll of this vicious cycle is that her indignation continues to justify the fluidity of her commitments. Now in her forties, she has never married, nor had a relationship that lasted more than a few months. She never had a position of employment that lasted more than a couple of years. She finds faults with every date, and if the relationship continues after the initial outing, the indignation starts to build. The same pattern can be seen at her workplace: coworkers, supervisors, even customers are seen as lacking, and unworthy of her enduring commitment. Such a narrative is not self-correcting, but self-justifying: "You see, I was right about … "

A similar dead-end narrative is perfectionism. Remember, we identified Herbert Simon's conjunctive approach of satisficing as the best way to deal with the multiple criteria coming from utilitarian (and ultimate) relevance. We need a solution that is good enough now, and not wait endlessly for the perfect option to arrive.

Pragmatically, we all have to wrestle with the question of how perfect we need to be. Our answer is: good enough so that no further effort is required. So, I'm perfect in just about every field that is **not** important to me. When I was about 11 years old, I had a perfect memory of all pennant winners in major league baseball from 1920 to 1960. I remember making a decision that I did not have to go back into prior years. I also purchased a set

of *Encyclopedia Britannica* that year and resolved to use my time reading that, rather than memorizing any more baseball stats. So, my knowledge of baseball is perfect (well, good enough). I never cared about hockey, so my knowledge of that is good enough too. I don't know how to fix a car or the plumbing, but I can hire people to do that. I could never learn all there is to know or how to do all things, but I'm perfect because I'm wise enough to figure out what I have to know and where I can rely upon others.

For me to continue to pursue self-improvement in areas that give me no intrinsic pleasure, and are not required by external necessity just to meet some unrealistic standard of adulthood would be the height of ulterior relevance.

Perfectionism is a dead-end narrative, leading only to pervasive inferiority feeling and frustration. The solution is a more realistic self-appraisal of obstacles and one's own limitations. Good enough is good enough!

Leanne is a high school student. She is intelligent and has strong potential for a good career in the future. Leanne gets good grades and is also a member of a handful of clubs and extracurricular activities. She works five hours a week babysitting.

Leanne is a perfectionist and holds a high standard for herself. She won't accept anything less than excellence from herself in each of the areas of her life. She is also anxious and depressed. Since she is a perfectionist, the standard she expects for herself is one hundred percent, and anything less than that puts her into a state of emotional distress.

One day, Leanne has a test at school. She has had a busier week than usual, and receives a score of eighty-eight percent. This is the first time that Leanne has received a grade lower than an A. Her perfectionist all-or-nothing mind kicks in, and she feels that it is not worth her time to keep working hard in this class. From here she spirals downward, losing her symbolic perfection of the 4.0 GPA, and this causes her to stop working so hard in her other classes.

Leanne didn't realize that she had been delicately propped up in an all-or-nothing system of thinking. In being released from one of the extremes, she finds herself falling towards the other, and she begins to suffer in all areas of her life.

Leanne had deluded herself into assigning ultimate relevance to her perfection. Her hard work was not a utilitarian means to an end but had become who she was. Achieving perfection had become her identity. But

humans are not perfect, and human perfection is not worthy of such commitment, so the relevance was only ulterior.

Other major forms of ulterior relevance come with addictions - not just alcohol, heroin, and cocaine, but behavioral addictions such as gambling. Any pursuit that is unworthy of the ultimate, but is pursued beyond the utilitarian criteria of "good enough" would qualify. The neurobiology of such addictions is understandable: we crave the powerful neurotransmitter rewards, perhaps to such an extent as to distract from the pursuit of things that have real instrumental value. Even the pursuits of things with real utilitarian value (e.g., money) become self-sabotaging when pursued in excess.

Several forms of addictive ulterior relevance quite commonly seen around the world today would be spectator sports and regularly scheduled television programs (even though these are now sometimes binge-watched). The common factor between these is that they involve rigid commitments to vicarious experience. Great joy when the team wins (or great sadness / anger when the team loses) can lead to riotous behavior at home and in public.

Some people's preferences and priorities, as manifested in their behavior, suggests that their greatest commitments are to following sports teams and celebrities, gambling, or thrill rides in amusement parks (anything that can be called pastimes). Perhaps we should call those wastetimes.

For other individuals, perhaps stuck at the social or self-esteem levels of Maslow's pyramid, there is the risk that they may define themselves by their material desires (or sophistication in meeting them). We can experience legitimate joy in appreciating the artistry of a fine wine, brewed cup of coffee, or well-prepared dish, but when we start defining ourselves by our tastes in order to be perceived by others as cooler, or more popular, or more successful, then we are trapped in our own ulterior relevance. "I'm such a connoisseur, envy me"!

If you define yourself as the biggest fan of someone else doing something important, that is a dead-end narrative that is going to interfere with your real-world pursuit of utilitarian relevance. This applies whether your team is the Dodgers or the Cubs, the 49ers or the Steelers, or whether you care about some sitcom or melodrama. We can enjoy the artistry of drama and the kinesthetic grace of sports but investing an enduring commitment beyond that point is dysfunctional.

Other forms of dead-end narratives are those based upon illusory claims of superiority. There are men who think "I may not have accomplished much

in my life. But, at least I'm better than my wife - she's just a woman." There are others who would change that last sentence to White, Christian, or American. Such misogynistic, racist, or xenophobic labels are not trophies of individual accomplishment, nor are they stamps of approval coming from a higher authority.

Trevor grew up in a Christian household. This was more than a label, but something to which his family was committed as ultimate relevance. Their narrative is that their lives must be lived in accordance with their religion and that anything outside of that is wrong. Trevor shared his family's enthusiasm for the local church at which they worshiped. He enjoyed the fellowship at the church and considered himself to have a strong relationship with God. But as the years of childhood turned into adolescent turmoil, Trevor realized that he was gay. His pastor and father never let him forget that this was in conflict with the teachings of Christianity (or at least with what his church taught about Christianity).

Is Trevor going to internalize that doctrine as his own narrative, denying his sexual orientation? Is he going to reject his church, his family, and his God? For his late adolescence and early adulthood, Trevor led a double life. He ended up marrying a woman whom he met at church because he knew that his family would never be accepting of his sexual orientation. He and his wife have children and live a "decent" life. However, Trevor is not entirely fulfilled, and he has maintained a secret long-term relationship with a male partner.

Trevor is now living separate and opposing narratives. When he is with his wife or family of origin, he joins in with discussions that speak out against homosexuality. When he is with his male partner, he is a willing participant in homosexuality.

Trevor can't live with these conflicting narratives for his entire life. He had intended to, but he decides that his ultimate relevance is that of self-actualization, and that cannot occur if he does not live an openly homosexual life. He has difficult conversations with his wife, children, and family of origin, and starts a home life with his male partner. Although people have been hurt during this process, Trevor is now living one narrative which is internally-driven. Trevor could no longer accept the doctrine or code of conduct of the church he was raised in. Fortunately, he found a more tolerant ministry and has become quite active in this new congregation.

It is one thing to criticize Trevor's decision as hurting the family he previously created with his wife and children. It would have been better for

all if he had come out of the closet earlier. However, let's call out the ulterior relevance of homophobia. Whether or not you regard what those gays do in the bedroom as "icky" just remember that some vegans regard what you do in the kitchen as disgusting. Our quest for ultimate relevance cannot be built on the disgust we have for what other people do in private.

We are fortunately seeing a shift in the mainstream narrative around sexuality. Until very recently, the heterosexual couple was held up as the gold standard. Many homosexuals disguised themselves within heterosexual marriage for fear of loss of good reputation or career. We can see clear examples of this in various celebrities who 'come out' later in life once careers have been fully established. Cary Grant married five women but some biographers allege that he lived with a man, and Freddie Mercury was openly gay with friends and family but hid it from the public. There is an almost endless list of famous people who build a career on an image that is not real, for the reason that heterosexuality has been the only type of sexuality that the mainstream has deemed an acceptable life narrative.

Not only has this been seen in film and rock stars, but in the political and religious arenas. Here the stigma has been even more powerful and the pressure stronger to conform to the mainstream, with any type of sexual feelings outside of the typical heterosexual relationship being a major threat to both job and family security. Recently, a noted Southern Baptist minister was discovered to have vacationed with a homosexual prostitute who he discovered on RentBoy.com. Similarly, a former Republican congressperson, who voted against gay marriage and otherwise voted against homosexuality, was allegedly romantically involved with a man. Again, these cases are not unusual and underscore the pressure that non-heterosexuals have felt to hide sexual identity in protection of career and reputation. The mainstream narrative has been clear for a long time: if you are not heterosexual, you are sexually perverted.

In recent years, however, what has previously been shameful and hidden is now being proudly presented. Those who are not standard heterosexuals are no longer in fear of being sexually different but are trying to find new ways to be so. Pansexual, bisexual, asexual, demisexual, skoliosexual, sapiosexual, and more – the list of possible types of sexualities is growing quickly. What has for decades been termed LGBT is now LBGTQIA as more and more people fight for the type of sexuality they resonate with to be officially recognized and respected. Simultaneously, the variations of genders are changing and growing. Women are getting married later in life

as they choose not to conform to gender-typical roles, and family shapes are changing as same-sex parents, single parents by choice, and even polyamorous families grow to become the norm.

Here's a paradoxically dead-end narrative: building a life solely on your ability to identify other people's dead-end narratives. We must constantly guard against ulterior relevance when we start to feel superior to others, especially when our superiority is based upon our ability to identify other people's values as ulterior. Mocking the foolishness of others should not be a source of pride. You may not "get" the rationale behind the Jewish kosher diet or the Jehovah's Witness rejection of blood transfusions, but that does not make you more profoundly spiritual. It just means that you can eat bacon or blood sausage. If we become intolerant, overly committed to asserting our superior wisdom in these areas, then it is we who have fallen into ulterior relevance. We need to focus on our own spiritual journeys, and not expect that others will applaud us as saints; indeed, we should anticipate that some will show us the aforementioned mocking.

Why is there such a great attraction to ulterior relevance? Because low mood is commonplace, and we seek more stimulating neurotransmitters. Just satisfying our bodily needs is not sufficient. Admitting that one is an addict is the first step of developing a healthier narrative: "I'm a recovering addict who is now. … "

These physiological mechanisms explain the addictive power of methamphetamine and cocaine, but also prejudice, fandom, and so many other forms of ulterior relevance. Utilitarian relevance just cannot generate enough satisfaction for its efforts by just keeping the body alive. For finding a purpose beyond sustained bodily functioning, we cannot do better than ultimate relevance.

Anything can be valuable from more than one perspective: ultimate, utilitarian and/or ulterior. Take an Olympic Gold Medal. Its utilitarian value is at least the price of the gold it can be melted down for, but surely someone would pay more at auction, especially if it could be considered as memorabilia related to a famous person (e.g., Jim Thorpe, Jesse Owens). Perhaps that reflects the ulterior relevance of fandom on the part of the buyer, but the dollars realized at auction represents utilitarian relevance to the seller. Perhaps the closest thing to ultimate relevance would be the medal's symbol of individual accomplishment and the peaceful competition of these sports. We are uplifted more by achievement of our goals than by

our attainment of material things. It is better to win a competition due to our talent and efforts than to win the lottery.

A basic flaw with our thinking is our tendency to underestimate how much of our thought and action is governed by ulterior relevance (or will be perceived as ulterior by others). We overestimate what will be applauded by others as a noble pursuit of ultimate relevance (or at least what will be tolerated by others as a pursuit of utilitarian relevance).

sphere	ultimate	utilitarian	ulterior
value	intrinsic	instrumental	inhibitory
vindication	transrational	rational	irrational
commitment	absolute	contingent	rigid or fluid

Emotion

Although narratives are made of words and purport to be a logical outline of the courses of our lives, the core of a narrative is its emotional appeal. If a narrative fails to meet our emotional needs, we cease to be committed to that narrative.

The term *affect* applies to a broad range of non-cognitive mental processes, what are commonly called emotions, feelings, preferences, priorities, motivations, drives, needs, or passions. Many of these are rooted in the body's needs to survive and thrive (what we have called utilitarian relevance). For Maslow, these physiological needs would have chronological priority, and would have to be addressed before other needs could be considered.

Animals experience the same physiological reactions, but the emotional meaning (relevance) may not be the same (especially when we move into the realms of the non-utilitarian: ultimate or ulterior).

It is when we experience emotion that we realize we are in contact with relevance: the more intense the emotion, the greater the potential to realize a value (or the greater the threat to a value). However, the correlation is neither strong nor linear, due to the fact that other variables may also impact the experience of the emotion.

One of the most important of these factors is cognitive (e.g., our level of expectation). *The more that our experience violates our expectation, the*

more intense the resulting emotion. This holds true for each of the four major emotions: joy, anger, fear, and sadness.

Think of an occasion from your childhood, one associated with great expectations. You are graduating from the fifth grade, but your family had scheduled a vacation at a campsite, and you had to leave a few hours early. You will miss not only the graduation ceremony, but the party that your friends were having. You are OK with the family decision because you actually prefer being in the forest rather than parties with other kids.

As soon as you get out of town, there is a big traffic jam. The family car is stuck for two hours. Dad considers turning around and heading home. You have already missed graduation, and won't be able to make it to the party anyway, and now it looks like you will be missing the camping, something you had really hoped for, so you feel *sad*. Fortunately, the traffic begins to clear, and Dad decides to continue on with the family's plans for camping.

When you arrive, who is there but your favorite member of the family, Uncle Ralph. You spent last summer on his farm going hunting with him and his hound dog Lady Tramp. And guess what he has for you! Lady Tramp just had a litter and Uncle Ralph brought one of the pups for you! This is surely better than a graduation party where all you do is eat cake and ice cream. Your *joy* is great because Uncle Ralph and the pup were not expected.

Let's now imagine an additional set of events that defy expectations. You get the new puppy and envision a wonderful time walking through the forest together. You come back from using the shower facility and see someone (an adult by his size) rolling around under the tent. As you enter the tent you see a medium sized bear and yell. The bear runs off, but you are gripped by *fear* that the bear has hurt the pup. This emotion is so intense because you have never seen a bear in these woods before (expectation) and the threat to value is greater than if the worst the bear could do was eat your stash of candy. But your greatest fear dissipates as you see and hear the pup under a blanket - he's fine (and the bear did not get your candy, either).

The next day, after a long hike with your new dog, you buy a cold pint of milk from the vending machine and have a great craving for a couple of chocolate bars. You go through your candy bag and there are some skittles and suckers, but no chocolate! Did that bear come back? Your older brother comes in with a face covered in chocolate, and he confesses to eating your candy, with the excuse that the ants got his, and he was going to pay you back once you got home. But you had this great desire of eating chocolate

now with your cold milk, and the expectation that he wouldn't take any of your chocolate without telling you first. You are really *angry* at him.

While the experience of emotion is an indicator of the presence of relevance, neither the type of emotion nor the intensity of the emotion is an indicator of the type of relevance involved. Just because you experience intense fear does not tell you if the relevance was utilitarian or ulterior. In other words, we cannot use emotion as a barometer for which value is greater, or more worthy of our commitment.

We must judge narratives by the values they connect with, not by the emotions that they excite.

Art

Narratives are more artistic than cognitive, reflecting the affective and value-laden. A narrative is more of a plot showing the pull of purpose rather than a vignette demonstrating the push of causes and resultant effects.

The task of art is to express and connect us with that which is relevant. Art is rarely appreciated for its mere utility, but usually for its ulterior or ultimate connections. The capacity to create and appreciate art is sometimes cited as one of the markers for distinguishing humans from other species (or perhaps future forms of artificial intelligence).

The merely utilitarian forms of art would be limited to those with the ability to persuade others: political propaganda and advertising.

What we regard as the highest forms of art are those that strive to embody the good, true, and beautiful. Most religious art falls into this category, from iconic paintings, to sculpture, to the chorale, to the architecture of a cathedral.

But most art lacks both utility and a connection to the divine (i.e., no pretention to the good, the true or the beautiful). Here we would see some of the worst examples of the common fare made for the television or the big screen: movies with gratuitous sex or violence, comedy based upon insults. The focus is on characters who are less than noble: villains or buffoons. We may be drawn to such art forms because of a voyeuristic joy in seeing the emotional life of others that accompanies the behaviors which are forbidden in our own (especially sex and violence).

The function of art as ulterior relevance is best understood by Freud: how the drives of sex and aggression fuel primary process thought, leading us to fixate on violent and pornographic content.

Comedy is a genre of art that may take the form of painting, theater, or music. Comedy seeks to remind us of the limitations of individual consciousness. Freud would point out its ties to sex and aggression (e.g., insult). From a Jungian perspective comedy serves to challenge the *persona* (the social mask we wear, determined by our roles). When the *persona* is challenged, this opens up the unconscious for further exploitation.

From an Adlerian perspective comedy lays bare the falsehoods of guiding fictions, thus liberating us from their ulterior relevance. A prime example of this would be the "Seinfeld" series so popular in the 1990s. The show was "about nothing." The characters would get all upset over the most frivolous of things, and yet acknowledge that those things really didn't matter (the relevance was ulterior).

In melodrama, the central theme is a battle between good and evil. The masked avenger has been a common dramatic theme in movies, radio, television, novels, or comic strips. This is the everyman who sheds his (or her) everyday identity to become the force that combats the enemies of society: the Green Hornet, Batman, Superman, Lone Ranger. All of us can have this avenger role when we put on a uniform (of the police, military or first responder) which indicates that we are shedding our individual identity in order to function in the role defined by service to the community.

Art creates a truth different from the truth of science. The truth that is discovered by science can be discovered again by the next person performing a similar lab experiment or performing the same calculation. However, art is the truth that is created, and this truth may not be created by another person in the future, or even by the same person again. This is because creativity is not formulaic. There is no specific algorithm for real art. We think of it in a unique moment of inspiration that may never replicate. Therefore, culture's main duty is to make sure that such creative products are shared with others and preserved for the future.

Culture must allow for present creativity to emerge from the mundane world, gain an audience and flourish, and then preserve it for the future. Another ramification of this is that culture must also honor the past, for how else will our future honor the accomplishments of the present?

As this affirmation of the past and openness to creating the future is necessary in great art, so it is necessary in creating each individual's life narratives (the greatest work of art).

Chapter 3

Religion as the Primal Narrative

What It Is; What It Isn't

Religion has been defined (Carmody & Brink, 2013) as *a system of doctrines, ethics, rituals, myths, and symbols for the expression of ultimate relevance*. By ultimate relevance we are referring to that which is ultimately significant because its value transcends the mundane world of our bodily concerns. For religious people, ultimate relevance refers to a divine or spiritual realm. The challenge for those who reject religion is to find spirituality without religion, or perhaps even ultimate relevance without what they might call spirituality. For humanists, whether religious or not, ultimate relevance necessarily includes building a legacy for future generations. It is only when we have the clarity of these definitions that we can comprehend the complexity of the role of religion in the development of our life narratives.

Religion should not be conceived as "faith" because that term is at best vague, and at worst, pejorative or pretentious. When a devout Evangelical Christian says, "We live by faith," those who do not share this spiritual orientation consider the statement to be a pretentious assertion of superiority. (If it is not clear already, we shall demonstrate that everyone lives by faith.) When an atheist says "Those Christians only have faith" the implication is that the latter have rejected science and reason in favor of superstition. But such atheists, as well as the Evangelicals they criticize, have misunderstood the nature of religion, both its structure and function.

Having taught the world religions course for almost fifty years, I (TLB) have noticed that when students use the term, even when not in the pretentious or pejorative contexts cited in the previous paragraph, the meaning is still quite vague, and might imply any (or several) of the following meanings:

1. membership in a given denomination,
2. strength of one's commitment,

3. acceptance of a specific doctrine.

What was said	What was meant
Ethan is a member of the Pentecostal faith.	Ethan belongs to the Pentecostal denomination.
Ahmed is strong in his faith.	Ahmed is deeply committed to his religion.
The divinity of Christ is a central aspect of the Christian faith.	The divinity of Christ is a central Christian doctrine.

The concept of "faith" is related to the Hebrew *emunah* which would be better translated as "trust" in the Lord God. But most of the scriptural appearance of "faith" appears in the New Testament where the Greek term was *pistis,* which would be better translated as loyalty, devotion, or commitment. The Latin *fids* and old English *fed* would be directly related to fidelity (or what we would call "faithful"). If we were to go back four centuries to when the King James translation was being composed, we would see this as the use of the term. When Shakespeare referred to "faith" in his plays, the implication was always loyalty, duty, obligation, allegiance, commitment. As Jordan Peterson urges his audiences "You are not committed to something unless you are willing to sacrifice for it." So, "faith" applies to religion insofar as people are really committed to that religion.

The other inappropriate term used in discussing religion is "belief." For critics of religion this is also a pejorative: something less than factual, something lacking scientific or rational evidence. The implication is that belief, within a religious context, cannot be justified to a fair-minded and rational person. Actually, most religions (apart from some Christian and Islamic sects) do not refer to aspects of their religion as "beliefs," and do not refer to their co-religionists as "believers." From our perspective, *belief refers to the cognitive component of attitudes*, and should be confined to factual judgments, estimates, or predictions, such as

- I believe that it rained a couple of inches yesterday.
- I believe that it will rain again tomorrow.

There is nothing inherently supernatural or spiritual (or anti-scientific) in the above statements. However, it is possible to have beliefs that lack empirical confirmation.

- I believe in Bigfoot (even though no carcasses have been found)
- I believe that extraterrestrial beings exist and have traveled to our planet

The inappropriate use of the term "belief" in understanding any component of religion becomes obvious when we review the definition of religion presented at the beginning of this chapter. None of religion's five components involve belief.

Doctrines are statements about deities, salvation, or the afterlife. Here are some doctrines familiar to most branches of Christianity.

- There is one God in the form of three-persons, a Trinity.
- All people have original sin, and only the expiation of Jesus' death on the cross brings salvation.
- For those who are saved, life after death will be in a spiritual paradise in the presence of God.

Here are some doctrines found in other religious traditions.

- God has a covenant with Israel (Jewish).
- Allah is the only God, and Muhammad is His prophet (Muslim).
- Escaping from life's suffering requires the Eightfold Path (Buddhist).
- According to your karma, your soul will be reincarnated (Hindu).

Most of the world's population embraces some form of monotheist doctrine (accepting only one God). Others accept many deities (polytheism) or none at all (atheism). Afterlife doctrines vary from a heaven (portrayed in Christian and Islamic traditions) to the transmigration of souls (in many south Asian and Hellenistic religions), to a bodily resurrection associated with apocalyptic battles (early Christianity, early Islam, Pharisees, Zoroastrians).

If we were to ask a devout adherent of one of these religions "why do you believe that"? We would not get an answer that was satisfactory to purely scientific or rational criteria.

"I believe that Jesus was the Son of God because the Bible says so."

Well, that begs the question: "why do you believe the Bible"?

"I believe the Bible because it is the word of God."

While for Christians the second answer is completely logically consistent with the first, for a skeptic, this is seen as circular reasoning in which the premise of each statement is taken from the conclusion of the other. Notice how we do not see this circularity when "belief" is understood in its proper context as a cognitive assessment of facts, e.g., belief that it rained an inch yesterday.

"Why do you believe that it rained an inch yesterday"?

"I saw the weather news on the TV last night."

"Well, look at the National Meteorological Service website where it says that it rained two inches last night. Do you still believe that it rained only one inch"?

"No, the NMS probably has better data."

Notice that this dialog did not end up in one party saying "Well, I have faith" or in the other party being called a hellbound heretic. Both sides can discuss the relative strengths of different data sources and can reach a (tentative) verdict on the question about how much it rained yesterday.

But religious doctrines are different. You cannot verify God's existence with a microscope. You cannot verify the nature of heaven with a telescope. You cannot verify the divinity of Jesus in a DNA lab. Doctrines are certainly not believed in the same way that factual statements are believed.

Doctrines are not believed: *religious doctrines are accepted* because of their relevance. Although I (TLB) have respect for many aspects of Hinduism, I have no attraction to its polytheistic doctrine. It is not a question of whether those countless Hindu deities exist in some spirit realm or whether the stone, clay or wooden idols have any special energy. Somehow, I just never developed an emotional bond to Kali or Ganeesh. Undoubtedly, this has to do with where I was raised and which kinds of cultural experiences I was exposed to. This is most obviously the case with the other components of religion, but it also holds with doctrines.

Similarly, people don't fall away from religious doctrine due to some new factual evidence. Remember what we have said in previous chapters: facts don't choose a narrative; narratives choose the facts.

Festinger (1958) studied a small religious movement that had preached an apocalyptic doctrine of angels coming in spaceships to take away its members, saving them from a world-ending calamity. When the prophesied date arrived, and the spaceships did not, the leaders were able to explain this as "God saw our faith and that has saved all of humanity from this fiery end

to the world." Facts don't refute doctrines. Indeed, this new fact could be woven into the evolving narrative of this group being special in their relationship with God.

Neither do newfound facts lead to conversions. Suppose a new laboratory study of the Shroud of Turin concludes: "Definitely from Palestine, dated to the first century, the markings due to a powerful burst of radiation from the body." Would most atheists respond with "Jesus was truly divine. I shall repent and be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"? As long as atheists meet their needs without reference to the spiritual (or meet their spiritual needs without reference to theistic doctrines) atheists are not about to convert just because some archaeologist has some new evidence about an event two millennia ago.

People fall away from doctrines (or embrace new ones) because of relevance (or the lack of relevance). We are committed to (have "faith" in) those doctrines that help us understand ultimate relevance. Those doctrines become part of our narrative. When the doctrines no longer support the evolving narrative, they are jettisoned (or moved to the back burners of the mind). This can be seen in the rise of the educated, urban, middle class in Mexico, especially for people who are still single. The Millennial generation is getting married later, having fewer children, and almost no one is becoming a priest or nun. Catholic ritual and doctrine are just not necessary.

On the other hand, sincere religious conversion can reflect and reinforce major changes in a life narrative, with accompanying changes in emotion, personality, and behavior. In the last century, Mexico was well over ninety percent Roman Catholic. That figure has fallen to about eighty percent. Some of this represents the urban middle class attrition but decrease in Catholics represents working class conversion to other Christian denominations: Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, Latter-day Saint, or Jehovah Witness. When interviewed, most women will admit that the conversion was more about finding a social support network which would discourage male infidelity and drinking. By contrast, most husbands admit that their attraction to these new religions is the emphasis on male authority in the household. So, the family's conversion is a grand bargain - the husband stops drinking and the wife becomes more docile. The Mormon doctrine about the celestial kingdoms is merely a way of conceptualizing the family relationship.

But for most people, the core of the religious experience lies in the interacting affective components of myth, symbol, and ritual.

In terms of its chronological appearance and overall importance, ritual is the foremost component of religion (Bell, 1997, 2009). *Rituals are ceremonies* that members of a religion are supposed to participate in. Most of these ceremonies are calendrical and repeat on an annual basis (e.g., Easter, Ramadan, Passover). Some repeat on a weekly basis (e.g., mass, sabbath). Other rituals are conducted to denote major life events (e.g., birth, adulthood, death, marriage) and become rites of passage (e.g., circumcision, baptism, confirmation, weddings, funerals).

Rituals should have no pretensions of technological efficacy. Bronislaw Malinowski (1944) distinguished between religion, magic, and technology. Only the last of these is based upon a scientific understanding of causation: if I employ this means (cause), I can expect to have that end (effect).

Rituals are not *believed*. Magic also understands external reality in terms of cause and effect, but the underlying dynamics are based upon a superstitious understanding of how the spirit world works. Both magic and religion employ rituals, but the purpose is different. Rituals associated with magic (e.g., spells) are designed to manipulate spiritual forces so that we can have some practical benefit (e.g., a love potion).

Religious rituals are ceremonies designed to worship deities. Religious rituals are less about getting something than giving something. One marker of a healthy religious doctrine is that it involves a narrative of gratitude. As the first narrative builder, religion incorporated the idea of praising God through ritual, even to the point of sacrifice. This began with animal and crop sacrifice, then human sacrifice, then Christianity came up with the doctrine of God Himself sacrificing His own Son.

The distinction between magic, technology, and religion is often blurred in tribal societies, but requires precise delineation in the modern era. My own research (TLB) with the *espiritistas* of Acapulco concluded that both the leaders and followers of this movement could carefully distinguish between physical problems requiring medical intervention and those requiring exorcism (e.g., *ojo malo*). Only the latter involved a narrative playing out in the spirit dimension.

Religious rituals are not *believed* in the same way we believe in the likely effectiveness of a medication. *Religious rituals are participated in.* We don't "believe in" weddings. We express our commitment to marriage by participating in a wedding. We express our commitment to the utilitarian relevance of wealth and health by employing technology. We express our commitment to ultimate relevance by participating in religious rituals (or

perhaps we use them to elicit ultimate relevance). In the 21st century, magic (apart from the entertainment provided by stage illusionists) has but ulterior relevance. When we express our commitment to such magic, we are embracing a dead-end narrative.

relevance	actions
ultimate	ritual
utilitarian	technology
ulterior	magic

Symbols are visual emblems that depict something with spiritual energy (e.g., a crucifix, fish). Symbols should have no pretensions of cognitive content (the way that a sign has when it conveys information). The purpose of the symbol is to express (or elicit an experience of) ultimate relevance.

Symbols are not *believed* in the way that we believe a red hexagonal sign reminds us to stop our vehicle. *Symbols are revered* because of their power to evoke the presence of ultimate relevance. Within our narratives, symbols are shorthand for representing our values.

Myths are stories about the past. History is the social science of past events for which empirical proof is sought. In popular parlance, a myth is a synonym for something masquerading as fact but lacking scientific confirmation, a falsehood. Within the context of the sociological interpretation of religion, a myth is not necessarily an event that did not happen, but an event whose telling is more about the social value of that event rather than the precise retelling of the facts. Myths are not *believed* (in the way that history is believed). *Myths are retold because of the values they portray*. A given story of the past may be both historically valid (i.e., it really happened that way) and mythic (i.e., it is still relevant to repeat the story because it conveys current values).

Myths, symbols, and rituals are intertwined. Symbols are often used in myths and rituals. Rituals make use of symbols, and sometimes re-enact myths. Myths are used to explain the origins of symbols and rituals. In the Roman Catholic mass (ritual) the Last Supper (myth) is re-enacted. The wafer and wine (symbols) become the body and blood of Jesus. This intertwining of myth, symbol, and ritual reaffirms commitment to the underlying narrative.

Purely secular aspects of society might also have myths, symbols, and rituals (but devoid of doctrines about deities and salvation). Consider the

national U.S. holiday, the Fourth of July. There are rituals such as parades and patriotic speeches retelling the founding of the nation (myth). The most cherished Fourth of July ritual is the fireworks (a symbol of the gunfire of the Revolutionary War).

Religious myths, rituals, and symbols should eschew any claims of utilitarian relevance. This is one of many similarities between religion and sports. Yet both are capable of eliciting extreme commitments from their followers. Both involve special events which are scheduled in a sacred place, and during which the normal rules of behavior are suspended. Although both involve some level of audience participation, most of what they do is observational and there are a select few (i.e., the clergy, the team) who wear special uniforms and engage in actions for the rest of us to witness (from the pews or the stands). The relevance of these actions defies any utilitarian motive. Special rules apply in these games. What separates sport from religious ritual is that the former has some kind of measurement: winners/losers, rankings, points, as well as an unpredictable outcome. These measurements are not real measures of health or wealth, so they are bereft of utilitarian relevance. Are we to reduce sports to ulterior relevance? Not if there are other vindicating features to sport, such as the development of the solidarity of the team, and the nurturing of the individual's capacity to delay physical comfort in the present for the pursuit of higher future goals. Unfortunately, both sports and religion can inspire passionate sectarian loyalty and violent defense of what is considered sacred.

Myths, symbols, and rituals (whether religious or secular) can lose their relevance over time, or be perceived as relevant by certain people, but not by others. For example, in 1492, an Italian explorer working for the Spanish government landed on some islands in the Caribbean. This historical fact can be verified by several sources. However, why the statues (symbols)? Why the holiday (rituals)? My (TLB) grandmother retold the story (myth) of Columbus because she was from Genoa, and she heard the story from her mother as a way of conveying the Genovese values of being brave and optimistic. In the last couple of decades some Indigenous "Americans" have objected to the holiday honoring Columbus because they saw other values being conveyed: greed and racism. Being opposed to those statues fit their narrative, just as showing reverence for those statues fit my grandmother's narrative.

Religion is the primal narrative because it goes back further than other human institutions. Before there were governments, laws, schools, or

writing, there were myths, symbols, and rituals giving the tribe a narrative. That narrative explained the origin of the people, sustained social cohesiveness, and helped them through the roughest of life's challenges.

Ethics: The Most Social Component of Religion

The aforementioned components of religion can be extremely personal and private. Many individuals rarely or never talk about the specific doctrines they accept. Unless most Catholics are in catechism, and unless most Protestants are in a Bible study, doctrines are more assumed than discussed. The same may be said of the reverence for certain symbols, especially in the home of a person living alone. Even some rituals (prayer) can be done in private.

Most of the major rituals of the calendar (e.g., weekly mass, Easter) are communal, just as the major rituals of the life cycle (e.g., birth, coming of age, marriage, funeral) are familial. The most clearly communal aspect of religion would be *ethics: rules for moral conduct*. Ethics are not believed, *ethics are followed*. When someone says, "I can't do that because it would be against my beliefs" we could translate that as "I have decided not to do that because I have decided to follow my ethics instead."

There is a private, internal dimension to ethics. It is these moral guidelines that enable us to justify our behaviors to ourselves. A person without an ethical narrative cannot rationally justify his or her actions in moral terms. Such people will continue to act but will have to scramble around for a narrative when pressed by others (or even when falling into a discomforting state of self-reflection).

Just as it is the capacity of our foresight that enables us to create the technology that will interact with the instrumental values of utilitarian relevance, it is the ethical component of our narrative that enables us to interact with the absolute values of ultimate relevance. Whenever the narrative applies to what we *should* do, values are implied.

Elaine's morning routine is simple: wake up, eat breakfast, make lunch, and leave for work. So far in our account, only utilitarian relevance has been implied. But when we see these behaviors from the perspective of Elaine's narrative, we begin to see some values beyond personal utility. "I care. I care about the planet. I care about others. I care about my body and my spirit." Now, we notice that Elaine wakes up to a Buddhist chanting ritual, eats a

healthy breakfast of organic fruit, granola, and yogurt, makes a lunch of grilled chicken salad, and goes to the gym on her way to work. She sees every action as fitting her narrative (but wonders if she should eliminate chicken and fish from her diet and go vegan).

The narrative explains actions in terms of the values that motivated the behavior: Elaine is committed to this routine because her narrative has convinced her that she *should* be doing these things. If she doesn't do them, she won't be rejected by her workplace, family, or society, but she will feel bad about herself, as she is committed to living a healthy lifestyle. But it is more than health and comfort: she is committed to a relevance beyond the utilitarian.

As we grow from childhood in our families, in society, and into our own selves, we learn by trial and error how these values work in conjunction with our own perceptions and the reactions of others to form the whole of the narrative. For example, a child may perform an action that the parents find unacceptable, such as stealing gum from a store. The parents may fear that allowing this action now may lead to illegal action when the child is older. Their perception is that by taking the child to the store and making them apologize to the manager, they will instill a value in the child that this is unacceptable behavior. A value may now have been created within this child – stealing is bad. The value becomes a part of the life narrative of the child: "I am a responsible person who does not steal."

But does the ethical orientation merely reduce to the utilitarian concern about building and maintaining social credibility? Are we good (in terms of behaving ethically) just because it is good for us (in terms of the advantages of having a favorable reputation)? Is honesty the best policy just because it is harder to remember complex lies? To behave morally just because it is to our advantage in a utilitarian sense is prudence, not ethics.

The utilitarian theory of ethics holds that we act in an ethical manner if our actions bring about *good results for others*. So, giving alms to the poor is morally laudable because it helps others achieve more comfort and wealth. Some limitations of this approach to ethics are that we cannot know, precisely

1. The complex and endless future ramifications of any of our actions.
2. The real material preferences of all future possible recipients of our actions.

Harold is a 53-year-old veteran of Desert Storm. He has an artificial leg, thanks to an Iraqi mine. He worked as a truck mechanic for over twenty years and was recently laid off when his company went bankrupt. He has just filed for unemployment, but really wants another job. One day he was in a discount grocery store where everything is supposed to be 98 cents (unless the price is marked differently). Harold only brought a ten-dollar bill and a little change. He found about a half dozen items, and he quickly calculated that these would come to about eight and half dollars. On his way to checkout, he saw a little bottle of imported olive oil (something he loves but does not really need). It had no price sticker, so he figured it was just another one of the 98 cent items. At the cash register, the little bottle of olive oil rang up at $2.99, so Harold calmly said he would put the item back, but the owner said, "No, you take it" in a kind and soft way. Harold said, "No, thank you" in a firm way and put the item back to its place on the shelf. The store owner got the item and put it in Harold's bag. Harold removed the item from the bag and returned it again.

Harold was uncomfortable, and then became angry. First, he sensed pity. That ten-dollar bill was not his last, just the only thing he brought with him to the cheap store that day. Second, and what is more important, Harold knew that some past customers had tried to cheat by removing the price stickers from items, hoping that the clerk would just ring up the 98 cents instead. What was most important to Harold was that no one had any reason to question his honesty. So, it was doubly important that he not accept that bottle of olive oil for 98 cents or free.

The store owner acted out of a good intention, to help another materially, but because he did not know the way that Harold really wanted to be treated, both men were disappointed and upset. Harold never returned to that store.

Religious ethics usually tie back to doctrines (the statements about deities, salvation, and afterlife). But this begs the question: am I acting good just to get saved and earn my eternal membership in heaven? Paradoxically, are the saints acting selflessly for the most selfish of reasons: a better spot in heaven?

To get a better understanding of the justification of ethics, go back to the doctrinal statements about deities. We are to be good because God is good. We are in His image. Of course, some denominations emphasize hellfire and damnation, and even refer to people who act morally as "God-fearing."

If we get beyond Christian, or even all monotheistic doctrine, perhaps we can frame ethics in this way. If the Deity is the great Creator of all that is,

then our actions worship the Deity in that we respect all of creation, and even the great creative force that runs through us. Since all values are created, the most important ethical duty is to defend creativity. Creativity requires both social connection as well as individual freedom. We must remain committed to achieving and preserving that delicate balance.

Narratives connect our behaviors to ultimate relevance via *ethical* systems, by reassuring us that our actions are aligned with ultimate goodness.

Ignorance of the law is no excuse (for avoiding conviction and punishment). But bad behavior due to ignorance (defined as lack of knowledge of facts) should not be morally culpable. I used to put toxic substances in the garbage (before I became aware of the deleterious consequences). Now, I try to safely recycle. Putting those toxic substances in my garbage was always bad for the environment, but it did not indicate that I was a bad person, just an uninformed person. But once I knew the impact of my behavior, I was ethically obligated to change it. My narrative has been "I am an environmentally responsible person." When confronted with the new fact ("this is toxic to the environment, and you can do something about it") I either had to

- Change my behavior
- Refuse to accept the fact that these items were toxic
- Change my narrative that I care about the environment

I changed my behavior.

A similar situation could be seen in the case of Hannah. Hannah sees herself as an environmentalist. She buys organic foods, recycles as much as possible, rides her bicycle to work instead of driving her car, and buys clothes and furniture from second-hand stores. Each day, on the way home from work, Hannah stops by a small pond to feed the ducks. It is important to Hannah to be kind to animals. She takes two slices of bread per day.

Hannah doesn't realize that bread is not good for ducks to eat. She doesn't realize that her action in feeding them bread is harming them. When she finds out, she is horrified. She learns that it is better to feed ducks bird seed, and she immediately begins to do so.

Hannah has not acted ethically wrong in any way. She was not aware that her action of feeding the ducks bread was harming them, so she was not taking an action that was choosing any kind of evil. Once she realized this

action may be harming the ducks, she was ethically bound to change her action. If she had continued to feed them bread, she would have been committing a form of evil.

We are ethically obligated to protect and serve others (family, community, humanity, other forms of life, and the planet's capacity to sustain life) and yet do so in a way that preserves the freedom of others as well. So, what is unethical? It is not so much due to a lack of knowledge of what is right, but a lack of courage in defending what is right. Specifically, unethical conduct involves the misuse of the will, a lack of courage to defend a higher value in the face of a temptation to serve a lower one. To sell one's daughter into prostitution in exchange for money that will be spent on an addiction would be an example of this.

Philip Zimbardo (2007) described evil as the intentional exercise of power to inflict psychological damage to others. He included such things as discrimination, bullying, torture, and genocide. Humiliating or enslaving another would also qualify (as in the above case of selling one's child into human trafficking).

One very useful guideline that we can all use when it comes to how to treat others is to *respect their agency* (free will). Going back to the case of Harold, the store owner's actions would not have materially harmed his customer, nor was the intention to humiliate. Unless we are dealing with an animal, infant, or someone with cognitive impairment, let's start with the assumption that people know what they want, and for us to insist on helping them in ways that they do not wish to be helped is offensive. Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1970; Brink & Janakes, 1979) referred to this approach as "I and thou" rather than treating others as things without agency.

Joe was raised in a Christian household. For his family, Christmas was the most special time of year. They did not retell the myth of Santa Claus but saw it instead as a religious holiday. They only exchanged handmade gifts as symbols of appreciation. Although most of the food made, gifts given or accepted, or other elements of their holiday season were utilitarian in nature, this dedication to doing for others reflected their commitment to something beyond the narrowness of self. Joe's mother works very hard to make this work for her family. She views her family's practices as giving them a strong bond and special memories.

As Joe grows older, however, he moves far away from his family and begins to lose contact with them. He begins to fall further away from the traditions he grew up with. He is now in his mid-thirties and doesn't make a

lot of money. He has, however, found a way to be profitable around Christmastime.

He has learned how to anticipate what the most popular toy will be at this time of year, and he buys many of them to re-sell to desperate parents for a much higher price. He jokingly refers to himself as "Santa's Little Scalper." Joe's narrative at this point is selfish and purely utilitarian: "I'm going to do whatever I want to do to help myself out." Joe has lost contact with ultimate relevance, and he is focused solely on the worship of money. He has an uncomfortable feeling that he is doing something unethical, but he holds money to be more important than that vague feeling.

Here is the real question about Joe. Is he unethical for making a buck at Christmastime, or just for wanting to? Not from our perspective: Joe is unethical only to the extent that his mercantile focus leads him away from the more important focus on family, or his upselling of merchandise creates a contrived scarcity.

Although ethics must be elaborated in a rational fashion, like all values there is more of a connection with emotion than reason. Pure rational calculation, without compassion, is a dead-end narrative of selfishness.

"It is reason which turns man's mind back on itself and divides him from everything that could disturb or afflict him … 'Perish if you will, I am secure'," mused J.J. Rousseau in *On the Origin of Inequality*. It is only the empathic connection of the emotion of pity that overcomes this.

Though emotion may be a sure sign that some values are involved, emotion cannot be used as an ethical guideline. That "uncomfortable feeling" in Joe's gut is not a moral arbiter.

Disgust does not distinguish between right and wrong. Indignation is a dead-end narrative, wholly within the realm of ulterior relevance. Indignation is neither a guide for utilitarian relevance (what best serves our health or wealth) nor for ultimate relevance (what is moral). Indignation and disgust are not the result of a violation of transcendent moral commitments, but of the interaction of personality conditioning and modeling.

Similarly, we cannot appeal to an emotion to tell us what is morally right. Empathy is not a virtue, but an emotion, no more noble than any other emotion (e.g., sadness, joy, fear, anger, disgust). Empathy only becomes virtuous when it is coupled with courageous actions, such as altruistic behavior. That is why the compassion of Christ was not sufficient, but needed the Crucifixion and the passion, as the most selfless and altruistic act in human history.

Free Will as a Moral Postulate

Willpower is the key to an understanding of ethics. In the absence of willpower, there is merely inclination fed by emotion. Willpower allows us to divert our energy from immediate gratification (the current and self-serving) to the service of the eternal and selfless.

When humans realized that they had free will, most also acknowledged that there was a God who

- had granted it to us,
- had declared it good,
- had allowed us to abuse it, and
- would hold us morally accountable for our use of it.

To acknowledge free will without God would have been terrifying for most people. It comes as no surprise that many atheists deny the existence of free will as a corollary to their denial of the existence of the Deity.

This implies that the theological affirmation of the existence of God is not a conclusion that can be based solely upon logic or scientific evidence, but a starting premise for theological and ethical reasoning.

One of the main themes of this book is that people have free will (personal agency). Or more precisely, we contend that *determinism is a dead-end narrative*. This will be demonstrated from both logical and scientific perspectives in later chapters. At this point in our exposition, we will focus on free will as a necessary assumption for having any ethical standards.

Willpower is the ability to pursue certain goals rather than others, even though there are obstacles or temptations to do otherwise.

We understand free will to be the individual's capacity to employ some self-control and resist the temptation to satisfy the temptations of immediate and personal pleasure in order to serve broader ethical obligations to that which is beyond the narrow interests of self (i.e., ultimate relevance).

Self-control takes place under each of the realms of relevance. Delayed gratification is the strategy under utilitarian relevance: foregoing an immediate, risky, or lesser pleasure in order to attain a future pleasure that is better. Self-control even functions within ulterior relevance and ends up repressing harmless or aesthetic impulses unnecessarily. Self-control within

the realm of ultimate relevance has more to do with moral purity, especially sacrifice in the service of higher, social purposes.

There can only be an ethical dimension to behavior if there is a capacity for cognitive reflection and agency. If free will did not exist, how could we call upon humans to resist the temptation to behave badly? It would be as futile as it is ridiculous to demand that a billiard ball resist the laws of physics. The billiard ball has no agency, no capacity to act in compliance with some moral code, nor even the cognitive capacity to comprehend such a code. We do not preach moralizing sermons to species lacking cognitive capacity. We do not preach the virtues of abstinence to the bull in hopes of converting the bull to celibacy, but we convert the bull to an ox in order to assure his abstinence.

Indeed, it was Immanuel Kant, in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, who reduced morality to the individual will. "Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world … which can be called good … except a good will. Intelligence, wit, judgment, and the other talents of the mind, however they be named, or courage, resolution, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which therefore constitutes what is called the character, is not good."

We experience our desires. We do not choose them. However, we may choose to place ourselves in certain contexts (i.e., times, places, roles) in which certain temptations heighten certain desires over others. We do not choose what is a fact and what is not. (That status must be determined by scientific observation.) We do choose which facts to seek out and then how to interpret the ones we discover. Most importantly, although choice plays only a minimal role in desires and facts, we choose which actions we undertake, and when, and where and how. But it is by those very actions that some values become more salient, and others quiescent.

If the brain is just a piece of meat that moves the other pieces of meat around, why do humans have a special status in relation to the other animals? If meat is just a different arrangement of carbon atoms, compared to a rock, why does life have any precedence over inanimate objects? Why is death, or even suffering, to be avoided? Rocks don't need narratives. Cattle don't need narratives. Humans have cognitive capacity and free will, so they need narratives.

If I do not acknowledge free will in the slaveholder, how can I condemn the enslavement of other humans? Are their cries for freedom any more than the squeak of a wheel wanting grease or the howl of a tethered dog?

According to William James, "It is a moral postulate about the universe … that what ought to be can be, and that bad acts cannot be fated, but that good ones must be possible in their place…."

Acknowledging values means acknowledging that we must postulate the human will that can strive for those values.

We have a duty to use our will to constrain our pleasures only because other humans have a desire to exercise their own agency, and it is extremely painful for them to have that agency denied.

Most people think that they are acting morally most of the time. Even those who choose evil consistently may be doing what they regard to be good. When they do choose evil it is usually portrayed as being under special circumstances "beyond their control." Usually, those who do evil would not admit that it is evil, but portray it as something done for the "greater good" or some other purpose. Demonstrators who are committed to the greater good of spreading the message of their causes often spray paint graffiti, smash a window, block a highway, loot a store, or engage in arson, thinking that such actions (while illegal) are somehow morally justified rather than evil.

Although moral actions intend to benefit the common good, there is often a lack of common understanding of what constitutes such a good. Over three centuries ago, John Locke reflected "the various and contrary choices that men make in the world do not argue that they do not all pursue good; but that the same thing is not good to every man alike."

People do not live in isolation, but the responses of each become the stimuli perceived by others. Therefore, we need to reconcile a common morality, even if it is built upon separate value assumptions. An evangelical Christian may oppose pornography because it flies in the face of his commitment to "sex in marriage only" while an atheist feminist may also oppose pornography because she regards it as exploitation of women by a patriarchal society. These two people may very well disagree on the morality and related public policies regarding abortion and same sex marriage. These two people may even disagree on specific topics within heterosexual marriage, e.g.,

- what is the proper age of consent,
- what constitutes spousal abuse,
- what are the grounds for divorce,
- should married women with children work outside of the home,
- what is an equitable division of housework,
- how much alimony should there be in divorce

Having different bodies with varying needs and preferences, people will vary in the values they place on different commodities. So, within the realm of utilitarian relevance we are led to what Durkheim called organic solidarity, just as the different organs of the body specialize according to what each part is best at doing (and what the whole needs most).

It has been the great hope of the founders of religious movements to present a common, uniting approach to ultimate relevance (e.g., doctrines, myths, symbols, rituals, and the most important social form of religion, ethics).

But once that quest turns from an invitation to the ultimate, to a criticism of others' myths, symbols, and rituals as ulterior, the consequence is division, and a redoubling of efforts leading to persecution. The "all of us" become an unbridgeable gulf between "we, the few righteous" and "them, the heretics and infidels."

Although morality may require the process of consensus in order to become operative in viable social institutions, ethics cannot be reduced to the mere product of consensus.

What seems obvious is that what is most morally culpable about commitment to ulterior relevance, is not the specific behaviors made (e.g., watching sports, getting drunk) but other behaviors that are ignored or precluded, leading to a dereliction of duty to higher values. Drinking becomes morally culpable when the alcoholic doesn't go to work or starts getting violent with others. Gambling becomes morally culpable when the gambler bets the family's rent money.

Reason does have a role in morality - we need to estimate the likely impact of our actions on others. However, there is a key limitation. We must always remember that human reason is but a flawed servant, and must never be regarded as the master to whom we owe unquestioning allegiance. Jonathan Haidt (2012) referred to humans' moral sense as the intuitive dog

with the righteous tail. Much of what passes for moral reasoning is but post hoc justification.

That which is ultimate cannot be relative to you and relative to me, but must transcend us and command obedience, obligation, and commitment from the both of us. That common commitment lies at the core of our mutual ethical code.

Religion is about connection, consequences, conversion. Connection is the communal aspect of worship in a supportive community. Durkheim was right - religion is the community portraying its past (myth), envisioning its future (doctrine) symbolizing itself (symbols), celebrating itself (ritual) and preserving itself with rules of conduct (ethics). Consequences deal with ethics and doctrine; violate these behavioral guidelines and you will suffer in the afterlife (next life) as punishment. Conversion is not just rapid re-alignment of denominations but could be a re-commitment to one's traditional religion.

It is in this conversion that we see resilience, the capacity to overcome the harshness of the natural world as well as redemption from our own past foolishness.

Religion also opens up a hope for justice, the protection of one's God against the forces that treat us unjustly (as well as the divine forgiveness for our own injustices). But we cannot merely rely upon God to do it for us, to wave the justice wand and make everything right. We must be committed to following the ethical guidelines.

Fundamentalism as a Dead-End Narrative

Fundamentalism is the position that contemporary religion should not stray too far from its historical roots ("Give me that old time religion, it's good enough for me.") Scripture is to be interpreted literally and applied to the ethics that guide our daily lives. We can live in the world but must not become "of the world."

Within Judaism, the Orthodox would represent the fundamentalist wing (about ten percent of American Jews), while the Reform would be the least fundamentalist, with Conservative Judaism falling somewhere in between. One way to tell them apart would be in the importance of the kosher diet. Do they go beyond the ban on pork and maintain separate dishes for meat and dairy? Few Reform Jews are that strict about the latter.

Within the branches of Christianity, there are strict Catholic and Orthodox followers who immerse their lives in rituals and strictly follow the ethical guidelines. However, at least in the U.S., the term "Fundamentalist" largely applies to Protestants. Synonyms would be "Born Again" or "Evangelical." Although these might be more common in certain denominations, it is less a matter of denominational affiliation than the great intensity of personal commitment. A fundamentalist Christian could be a Baptist, a Pentecostal, a Presbyterian or a Lutheran, possibly even a Methodist. Many of them do not acknowledge an allegiance to a specific denomination. They might just call themselves "Christians." If the family relocates to another city (or if a new pastor heads the local congregation), the family might start searching for a new church.

Leon grew up in a small town in upstate New York, where everyone was White. Most of the people were poor or working class, and the majority of the families had someone who worked in a shoe factory. Growing up, he spent more time at church than he did at school: the main Sunday services, Sunday school, Bible study, revivals, and (Leon's favorite) church league sports. The church was known as "Primitive Methodist", but a Baptist could walk into that church and not notice much difference.

World War II brought Leon to California. He remained close to an army buddy who later became a Baptist pastor, so Leon later joined his congregation. Twenty years later when his buddy died, Leon joined an Assembly of God Church because it was nearby and his friends at work recommended it. Then he attended a revival at a Pentecostal church on the other side of town, and started going there. When he got too old to take care of himself, he relocated to live with his son and went to a nearby non-denominational church. When he became less and less mobile, he ended up spending Sunday morning watching religious programs on television, especially Joel Osteen. Although he switched denominational affiliations, these labels were not the important thing for Leon. He was always ready to advise the next generation that committing his life to Christ was the best decision he ever made. (Coming to California, working for IBM, and marrying his second wife were also high on the list). His narrative was always "I am a wise man, and a good Christian" rather than "I'm a strict Primitive Methodist." His membership in a given denomination was tentative and maintained as long as it supported the overarching narrative.

Over a century ago, sociologist Max Weber noted many distinctions between the two main European sects of Christianity (i.e., the Catholic and

the Protestant). While Catholics recognized that an ascetic life should be confined to those who had taken the vows of the cloister, Protestantism (at least the versions portrayed by Weber) were prescribing it for the laity. Catholics had been content to punish the heretic but were willing to indulge the repentant sinner. The Protestant version of "asceticism turned with all its force against one thing: the spontaneous enjoyment of life and all it had to offer." Such an approach to religion is less an embrace of ultimate relevance than it is a rejection of the ulterior (including all those Roman Catholic rituals that had ceased to be relevant in the absolute sense). But as we said in the last chapter, even eliminating utilitarian relevance does not guarantee achieving contact with ultimate relevance.

One of the powerful holds that fundamentalism has on many people is the fear of falling into heresy. Most of us fear, deep down, that we could be branded as apostate, blasphemous, or sacrilegious because we are religiously inspired by something that our tradition does not consider orthodox (or because we are not inspired by something that our tradition requires of its followers). Here there is no substitute for individual courage to challenge (i.e., leave) a religious tradition that the individual no longer finds relevant.

Here again the case of Leon is worth considering. He read the Bible daily and prayed quietly daily. He usually made it to Sunday services, but not on the days when something else had been scheduled (e.g., a special vacation or major trip for a sporting event). After high school, he no longer relied on the church leagues to supply his sporting needs. He scheduled his own badminton, tennis, softball, volleyball. His main interest was ballroom dancing, and that took up three nights a week. Indeed, one of the reasons he sought out a specific church was their tolerance for dancing (whereas those old Primitive Methodists did not). Any external observer would have to label Leon a moral man. He did not:

- Drink alcohol,
- Smoke,
- Commit adultery,
- Use foul language, or
- Gamble.

But he was not an ascetic. He worked an eight-hour shift, and did not aspire to become a manager, let alone an executive or entrepreneur.

Similarly, his religion did not serve as a barrier to interacting with others. He enjoyed the social activities supplied by his workplace and became a member of the Moose Lodge. He belonged to (and became the leader of) several folk dance and ballroom dance clubs. Those groups were diverse in terms of the denominational affiliation of their members: Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, with perhaps less than a quarter being people attending churches that Leon had ever belonged to.

A great limitation of fundamentalism is that they would prefer to separate themselves from sinners rather than embrace those sinners in dialogue. The larger society cannot be healthy if it unnecessarily rejects people's most passionate commitments as heretical or perverse. When Ferdinand and Isabela reconquered Spain and forced the Jews to convert to Catholics, many of these "Maranos" just practiced Jewish rituals in secret. When most Western cultures told homosexuals to remain in the closet, this precluded a degree of open participation by these individuals in the larger society, including religion.

Another limitation of fundamentalism is a rigid, impersonal ethical standard. Fundamentalists are supposed to seek the answer in scripture and apply it literally, ignoring the nuances of the case at hand. Over three thousand years of Jewish history has moderated the Rabbinic tradition, but Evangelicals may have an intellectual gap of more than fifteen hundred years when it comes to interpreting the scripture, yielding a great rigidity in practice.

Jessie was one of my patients (TLB). She was in her early nineties. Her mental assessment revealed mild and episodic depression, but no cognitive impairment: she knew when it was, who I was, where she was, and why she was there. She had never married or had children, and had moved to California during World War II to become a Rosie the Riveter in a Boeing Plant. Jessie loved singing in the church choir, golf, hiking, and swimming. She became increasingly arthritic after retirement, and after a hip fracture, had to be placed in a nursing home. The sad part was that she was in constant pain but wanted to move around. One day, the attendant could not find her in her room or the rec room or the cafeteria. As I walked to my car, I found Jessie in her wheelchair under a tree. "It's almost dinner time!" She looked up, forlornly and said that she knew what time it was. "Can I wheel you to the cafeteria?" She politely declined my offer and said that she needed to pray some more. "Don't you have your regular prayer group tonight after dinner"? Her answer was one that I shall never forget. "Yes, I go to that

every night, and tell the Lord that I am ready to go to Heaven. But I have been praying for that for so long. I don't think He can hear me inside."

When I returned to the facility the following week, I was informed that Jessie had passed away a couple of nights after I had last seen her. Her prayers had been answered, but the really sad part was that there were so many other patients who had said, "I don't want to be a burden to my family" who were being kept alive a long time after their brains had given up maintaining a sense of identity. Their last wish, while they still had agency, was to have a painless passing, but that was going to be delayed by a combination of fundamentalist ethics ("Thou shalt not kill"), outdated laws, archaic medical ethics, and distorted reimbursement policies.

Cults as Dead-End Narratives

Most people think of a cult as any religion that they would be embarrassed about if their teenagers converted to. The formal definition of a cult is a relatively new religious movement that meets both of these criteria (Carmody & Brink, 2013).

1. Its doctrine is not consistent with what is considered orthodox or mainline within the larger society.
2. It is abusive of its followers, exploiting them sexually and financially, exposing them to undue dangers, or constraining their freedom.

Few established religions deserve the designation of cult. Many Evangelical Christians refer to the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) as cults. During the times of Charles Taze Russell or Joseph Smith, there might have been some such argument to be made, but clearly not so much in the present generation.

Most people also tend to mentally merge cults and fundamentalist religious groups (at least those that they disagree with). However, sociologists note some important distinctions. Fundamentalist denominations tend to have a longer history, while sociologists sometimes refer to cults as NRMs (new religious movements). Another distinction is sheer size - the established religions have amassed a larger congregation, usually due to birth rates, whereas most of the members of cults are recent converts. Some cults

claim to hearken back to the original or pure form of a religion, but that would describe most Protestant innovations (which usually had some novel features as well as newly emphasized ties to the first century).

One of the most important distinctions is leadership. Most fundamentalist leaders describe themselves as teachers (e.g., pastors, preachers, rabbis, imams) who merely point to the Bible, Qur'an, Talmud, etc. Cult leaders are more likely to appropriate a title such as prophet, incarnation, etc. Cult leaders are more likely to be charismatic proselytizers who can build and motivate membership, but that would also bring the danger of exploiting the membership. The danger of reprisal does not end when an individual tries to leave a cult. The reprisal can be relatively mild disfellowship and shunning by previous friends and family, or more severe measures.

In many ways, cults are like abusive marriages. People get in them when they are most vulnerable emotionally. When they realize the dangers of the cult or the flaws of the leader, it may be too late. They may have already lost their fortune and freedom, and may be risking their safety and social connections by leaving. Here are the two main red flags:

1. Are they too eager to get you to convert?
2. Are they threatening toward, or even highly critical of, former members?

If these red flags are absent, the new religion is probably not a cult.

In many ways, joining a cult is even worse than being in a fundamentalist congregation. Both are going to constrain your ability to craft your own unique religious narrative. However, the cult would be worse because the authorized narrative is going to change frequently due to the whim of the leader.

Carl is now in his mid-thirties. He had always been a shy boy. But he was a good student and got an engineering degree from the University of California Berkeley. He spent five years working with a major tech firm in Silicon Valley and then went with a startup. After almost ten years, he is their senior engineer. With a good salary and stock options from work (and a low consumption pattern in his personal life), he has accumulated a nice nest egg.

Within fourteen months, he suffered two setbacks. His physician wife of five years has decided to bail out of their childless marriage. Although the

split is amicable and will not significantly reduce his wealth, it has hit him emotionally - he feels rejected ("and she was no prize"). The second disappointment is work-related. The company had an opening for vice president of engineering, and chose to hire an outsider rather than promote Carl. Again, he feels rejected and unappreciated.

While walking around downtown San Francisco one Saturday, Carl sees a big sign "Free Personality Test." Carl cannot resist and takes the Oxford Personality Inventory, which is then scored immediately. The attendant then explains, "I'm so glad you came in today, Carl. Look – you see these dips in the graph? Has anything been happening recently in your life?" When Carl mentions the divorce and the lost promotion, the attendant has an explanation. "You are really intelligent, competent, and hard working - a dedicated soul. Any woman should be proud to have you as a husband. Any company should be grateful to have you as an employee. But, these personality deficiencies," he points to the graph that just came out of the computer printer, "these deficiencies you see right here are your Achilles heel." Then he reassures Carl that his problem can be easily fixed. "Where do you live? Palo Alto? We have a Monday night class that is especially for these deficiencies. Not available Monday night? Which night can you make? Thursday? We have something in Sunnyvale, would that be close enough?" Carl signs up. He finds the "course" to be a little shallow and speculative about "engrams", but he is pleased with the enthusiasm of the new people he meets. They tell Carl that he needs individual "auditing" with an E-meter. Three months later, Carl quits his job, liquidates his investments, and moves down to a desert compound in southern California. The major topic of the daily discussions is what to do about defectors.

Radical Secularism as a Dead-End Narrative

Is atheism a religion? Not according to our definition of religion as a system of doctrines, ethics, rituals, myths, and symbols for the expression of ultimate relevance. Atheism is a doctrine insofar as it is a statement about deities: "no deities exist." Most atheists would also subscribe to the doctrinal statement "no afterlife exists": no heaven, no hell, no purgatory, no limbo, no resurrection, no reincarnation. Some atheists also reject the idea of salvation, or at least salvation associated with a deity or afterlife. But to categorize atheism as a religion would be to define bald as a hair color.

Atheist doctrine could be incorporated into a religion if we could find the other components: the ethics, the myths, the symbols, and the rituals. Indeed, there is one South Asian religious tradition, the Jain, that would qualify as atheist since it denies the existence of deities. Jainism does accept the idea of individual souls that are reincarnated according to their karma.

Most atheists (and agnostics) in the contemporary Western World not only reject doctrines of deities, afterlife, and spiritual salvation, but also myths, symbols, and rituals that have theistic implications. Atheists generally reject ethical codes built upon the commandments of (non-existent) deities. This does not make them immoral in practice, just incapable of justifying their ethical decisions by appealing to a divine commandment. Most atheists realize that society does need moral codes accepted by the vast majority of individuals so that selfish and aggressive behaviors can be suppressed or regulated, making more cooperative societies possible.

Is atheism a dead-end narrative? Our answer is "not necessarily." We cite as examples an ancient tradition and two recent thinkers on this matter. The Jain tradition holds the doctrine that there are no deities to help us on the spiritual quest of our own individual souls, yet this religion emphasizes meditation and the highest ethical traditions when it comes to avoiding harm to others. Sam Harris (2014) has roundly criticized the intellectual shortcomings of traditional Christianity and Islam, but has defended the need for ethical conduct and meditation. Alan de Botton (2012) has emphasized the need for atheists to form an ethical (if not spiritual) community based upon altruism.

While atheists reject the doctrine of a deity and the prefabricated religious package offered by established religious traditions, not all atheists are hostile to religious establishments. Most just want to be left alone and not forced to participate in someone else's rituals or follow someone else's morality (e.g., bans on abortion or gay marriage). Most atheists have never been to a meeting where they conspire about how to limit the religious practice of others.

We must distinguish between the millions of atheists that can be found in the Western World and radical secularism. Now, secularism itself is hardly evil or un-American. A secular society is merely one not dominated by a particular religious tradition. The United States was set up to be a secular society, as the First Amendment prohibits "establishment" of a particular church. So, governmental, and many private institutions, are secular. But "secular" has always implied impartiality between the

competing religions (as well as those who select no religious tradition); the American secular heritage has not conveyed an anti-religious bias.

However, during the last couple of decades, there has been the development of several brands of militant atheism (e.g., Hitchens, 2007) and an accompanying radical secularism. These critics portray mainline religion as an extreme fundamentalism that is both monolithic and stagnant. Social scientists realize that religion, like most social institutions, is both diverse and dynamic. Even ancient traditions such as Judaism and Hinduism exhibit an unending morphological transformation such that the practice of contemporary congregations would be unrecognizable to the Hebrew or Aryan priests of three thousand years ago. Radical secularism misunderstands religion and would prefer to abolish it rather than work with religious congregations toward common goals. For this reason, radical secularism is a dead-end narrative when it comes to uniting a society in which most of the population still express allegiance to a specific denomination.

But the militant atheists have a point (that fits some fundamentalists and most cults). Religious narratives can be oppressive. But are all religions inherently so? That would boil down to how we define "oppressive." A main function of religious ethics (and perhaps the doctrines and myths that support them) is to constrain sexual, selfish, and aggressive behavior (i.e., thou shalt not commit adultery, steal, kill). Some religious narratives (e.g., Confucian, Hindu) are oppressive in that they serve to keep people in certain limited social roles (e.g., castes, patriarchy) and obligate individuals to perform duties associated with those roles.

However, we would offer a more limited understanding of oppression: you are oppressed when you cannot escape the confines of someone else's narrative, especially if that narrative is one that you do not wish to share. This would obviously be the case in theocratic societies where the fundamentalist leaders' edicts are backed up by political and police powers. We would suggest that some religious narratives are potentially liberating (e.g., Christianity, Buddhism) and that much religious conversion is conceived by the convert as an escape to freedom. If no current narrative is adequate, then the individual is ripe for conversion. Indeed, you cannot be liberated if you cannot choose a new narrative.

One particular target of many radical secularists has been the inherent patriarchal nature of most religious traditions (from ancient Hebrew patriarchs to contemporary Latter-day Saint prophets). But rather than

dismissing such symbolism as a mere manifestation of toxic masculinity, perhaps we should view this as an attempt to rise above the testosterone.

The central attributes of the deity (omniscience, omnipotence, beneficence) are stereotyped as central male virtues. So, it is not hard to understand why the Abrahamic God is conceived as male. Each male is nurtured to have these attributes. He should become more knowledgeable and wiser (even though he can never achieve omniscience). He should become more powerful within the social order due to status and economic power (even though he can never become omnipotent). But most important of all, he is to become beneficent in the sense of altruistic and protective (and correspondingly, less selfish, and exploitive).

Also, we must recognize that patriarchal symbolism does not completely crowd out feminist and womanist dimensions of religion (Daley, 1968; Carmody, 1979, 1982; Reuther, 1994, 1996, 2005). Religion's past and future have room for being relevant to more than one narrow understanding of one gender.

Religion's Future

Rather than seeing religion as a relic of past narratives that have become irrelevant in an age of science, we think that religion can have a future, if it is willing to detach from some past dead-end narratives.

As described in previous writings (Carmody & Brink, 2013), religious morphology is about changing the doctrine (or other components) of religion to keep it effective in the expression of relevance. A major route that such morphology has taken has been that of syncretism, the blending of different religious traditions due to historical contacts between peoples. Christianity began as a new sect within Judaism, but before it died out, proselytizers brought it to the Greco-Roman world where its doctrine mixed with Stoic philosophy. As it went to Northern Europe, it mixed with Celtic and Teutonic myths, symbols, and rituals. Buddhism began within Hinduism, but took root in East Asia, where it mixed with local traditions as well as Daoist doctrine and ritual (particularly in Zen).

The daunting task of religious doctrine is to simultaneously be deferential to the past, as well as relevant to the present, and also capable of inspiring us to strive for the future.

The daunting task of religious ethics is to call forth our highest and noblest behavior and yet be compassionate toward our fellows who fail to meet those standards.

The daunting task of religious ritual is to cherish actions that have no functional utility, but that are solely relevant in non-utilitarian ways.

The daunting task of myth is to inspire us to strive for the future by repeating stories from the past.

Following Leon's example, it is OK to leave a given church if it no longer meets our religious needs. If spirituality is a journey, then specific religious traditions would be the luggage. Sometimes we underpack, and sometimes we overpack, and sometimes our bags do not arrive at the right destination. Sometimes our bags get hijacked by others headed in a different direction.

Our position has been that it is not possible for an individual to be bereft of any narrative. From my Judeo-Christian, or more specifically, Jesuit Catholic perspective (TLB), the narrative has been clearly framed by two thousand years of theology. The story of the Fall of Adam and Eve is one of the most relevant myths for understanding human consciousness. Our primordial parents ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their punishment includes physical work (for Adam) and the pain of childbirth (for Eve), but also our forebears were cursed with an inability to ignore the perception of values. The obvious narrative of the myth as recorded in Genesis is original sin - that Adam and Eve have free will and use it to rebel against the authority of God. Their spiritual quest is thereby defined as seeking to end the rupture in the relationship with God. Is this to be achieved by a new covenant (Judaism), a divine sacrifice (Christianity) or a series of prophets (Islam)? All three religious narratives portray a merciful God who requires only obedience.

Could a modern person embrace a Nietzschean or Buddhist narrative? Of course! Humans must rise above good and evil. The latter religious journey has developed a monastic tradition in which meditation offers a fundamental alteration of human consciousness with profound implications on how to avoid the pull of utilitarian relevance. All people develop a narrative, but some narratives do a better job of connecting with ultimate relevance, and the dead-end narratives get stuck in the ulterior.

Whichever religious narrative that I choose to guide my life is that gateway by which the interaction between the spirit and the material takes

place. But the dynamic is in both directions. My explorations within the spiritual may also change my narrative.

For some individuals, the spiritual journey is entirely personal and private, devoid of public ceremonies. But many of us relish the chance to attend a baptism, christening, or bris. We feel a social as well as a spiritual need to connect with a community of shared doctrines, but let's have the courage to walk away from (or at least speak out) whenever we witness any sexual or financial abuse. Such actions by our clerical leaders are the worst form of evil done in the name of the divine.

Chapter 4

The Thinking Species: How Logic Shapes the Narrative

In previous chapters, we referred to humans as emotional beings who happen to possess some capacity for thinking. Emotion is ontologically and chronologically prior to thought, both for the human species as well as for the developing individual. Logician Eugenia Cheng (2018) reflected, "Emotions do not lie. They are never false. … If you feel something, then the fact that you feel it cannot be argued down by logic."

Tribal humans living their primal narrative (centered around religious ritual) had little need for complex thought. Humans have an innate capacity for language formation. The first use was to express emotions. As language became more sophisticated, the emotions were expressed by stories. The first stories were myths, stories about the past designed to convey the tribe's identity and values.

But that same linguistic capacity can be used to categorize, and this is what later developed into reasoning. The first categorizations were used in the formulation of identity, less of an individual identity rather than the identity of the tribe. "We are the tribe of the buffalo hunters" (or the setting moon, or the rising sun, or the endless waters).

About ten thousand years ago, the agricultural revolution began. This was most likely to occur at those locations that were favored by temperate climate, fertile soil, and the availability of fresh water. Over time, population density increased, some workers specialized in non-agricultural production, and cities began to emerge. This stimulated the development of cultural tools such as mathematics and advanced language, which now had to be more precise to keep track of the increased amount of agricultural production and the greater complexity of relationships between individuals. Once Hammurabi or Moses had written down some rules on stone, it became imperative that the application of laws (ethical guidelines) to specific cases maintain some consistency.

Deductive Logic: The "if/then" of Conditionals

Logic is all about consistency of thought. It is not miraculous or indicative of vastly superior intelligence. A basic form of logic is the use of conditional statements, so common nowadays in computer programming.

Conditional statements take the form of: if this is true, then that is true. (When we are referring to action, the algorithm is "if this happens, then do that.") To use the formal terminology of logic: *if the antecedent is true, then the consequent is true.* Here are some examples applicable in ethics.

- If you stab another person to death, then you are a murderer.
- If you take someone else's property, then you are a thief.
- If you have sex with someone else's wife, then you are an adulterer.

Such logic helps those who safeguard society's ethics (e.g., rabbis, judges) maintain a uniformity of application that should be more efficient and perceived as fairer.

The *modus ponens* approach to conditional reasoning assumes the antecedent, and then affirms the consequent.

- Mr. A stabbed Mr. B to death (antecedent); therefore, Mr. A is a murderer (consequent).
- Mr. C took Mr. D's property (antecedent); therefore, Mr. C is a thief (consequent).
- Mr. E had sex with Mr. F's wife (antecedent); therefore, Mr. E is an adulterer (consequent).

Another form of logic which utilizes such conditional statements is the *modus tollens* which starts by assuming the absence of the consequent, and then denies the antecedent.

- Mr. G is not a murderer; therefore, Mr. G has not stabbed anyone to death.
- Mr. H is not a thief; therefore, Mr. H has not taken anyone else's property without consent.
- Mr. I is not an adulterer; therefore, Mr. I has not had sex with anyone else's wife.

One limitation of such conditional logic is that it does not always see the exceptions that get in the way of the conclusions being right 100% of the time.

- Murder: suppose this was a time of war, and killing was justified by national security?
- Theft: suppose the property being taken is to settle a legitimate debt?
- Adultery: suppose the marriage has been dissolved by divorce or death?

Dead-End Narrative: Logical Fallacies #1

Another problem with such conditional reasoning is that neither the modus ponens nor the modus tollens can be run in reverse. We cannot assume the consequent, and then affirm the antecedent. This is a problem for such conditional logic whenever there is more than one way to get from the antecedent to the consequent. Here are examples.

- Mr. J is a murderer (consequent); therefore, he must have stabbed someone (antecedent): maybe he strangled his victim.
- Mr. K is a thief (consequent); therefore, he must have taken someone's property (antecedent): maybe he only stole cash.
- Mr. J is an adulterer (consequent); therefore, he must have had sex with someone else's wife (antecedent): maybe he is a married man who had sex with an unmarried woman.

Having multiple antecedents also means that we cannot assume the absence of the antecedent and then assume the absence of the consequent.

Such examples of reasoning are known as logical fallacies. A fallacy does not mean that the conclusion is necessarily wrong, just that it cannot be proven through logic alone. The conclusion might be true, but then again, it might not be so - it just cannot be guaranteed by the conditional logic of the *modus ponens* or the *modus tollens*.

	If we assume	Then we conclude
Modus Ponens (valid logic)	Antecedent present	Consequent present
Fallacy of affirming the consequent	Consequent present	Antecedent present
Modus Tollens (valid logic)	Consequent absent	Antecedent absent
Fallacy of denying the antecedent	Antecedent absent	Consequent absent

The disadvantage of committing such a logical fallacy is that it could impair our pursuit of utilitarian relevance. So much of our routine, pragmatic narratives embrace this sort of categorical reasoning.

Narratives function to make suffering tolerable by reassuring us that our behavior really matters, that it has some connection with relevance. This is most obvious in the case of utilitarian relevance.

- If I earn a college degree, I will make more money
- If I exercise daily, I will lose weight
- If I invest a hundred dollars a month in dollar-cost-averaging stocks, I will be rich in thirty years.

Each of these statements pertains to our earthly goals of utilitarian relevance: health and wealth. The narrative involves a set of *causal assumptions* that our efforts have some probability of achieving these goals: the antecedents are causes (means) and the consequents are the effects (goals). Whether or not these particular means will be, in reality, effective, requires more than a *modus ponens* or *modus ponens*; it requires actual scientific evidence.

Frequently, such "real world" evidence shows that it may not be as simple as "Do A and then expect C." Sometimes you have to do A *and* B in order to have any hope for C.

Amanda, Heather, and Jennifer all want to lose weight. They each hold the narrative of, "if I exercise, then I will lose weight." They all begin the same exercise plan. Let's assume that they all have sufficient willpower to exercise regularly.

Amanda decides to change the way she eats as well as her exercise habits. She cuts most of the 'junk' food and sticks to mostly healthy foods. Over time, she finds that she is losing weight. Heather does not change the way she eats. She continues to eat mostly junk food. Over time, she finds that she does not lose any weight. Jennifer not only continues to eat the way she has before, including mostly junk foods, but she is unaware that she has

developed diabetes. Even though she has begun to exercise, she finds that she has actually gained weight.

Each of these women was operating under the flawed reasoning of, "if I exercise, then I will lose weight." In Amanda's case, it happened to be true, but only because she added another factor of diet change. A confounding variable was introduced so we cannot be sure that the exercise itself was the cause of her weight loss.

Deductive Logic: Categorical Syllogisms

Most forms of deductive logic involve general rules which are then applied to specific cases. The most common form of deductive logic is the use of categories (e.g., all, only, no) and syllogisms (three related statements: major premise, minor premise, conclusion). Here is the classic example.

MAJOR PREMISE: All men are mortal.
MINOR PREMISE: Socrates is a man.
VALID CONCLUSION: Socrates is mortal.

Notice that the major premise is a statement about a complete category (men) asserting something about a characteristic common to that category (mortality). That statement must contain a word like *all*, *only* or *no*. Here are some examples of statements that could be used as a major premise.

- All mothers are women.
- Only women can be mothers.
- No men can be mothers.

The minor premise is a statement about a specific individual having membership in the category (or sharing the specific characteristic of that category).

Notice how each of the above statements could be the major premise of a syllogism once we combine it with a minor premise about an individual.

MAJOR PREMISE: All mothers are women.
MINOR PREMISE: Gloria is a mother.

VALID CONCLUSION: Gloria is a woman.

(The same minor premise and conclusions would also fit if the major premise was "Only women are mothers.")

MAJOR PREMISE: All mothers are women.
MINOR PREMISE: John is not a woman.
VALID CONCLUSION: John is not a mother.

(The same minor premise and conclusions would also fit if the major premise was "No men can be mothers.")

MAJOR PREMISE: No men can be mothers.
MINOR PREMISE: John is a man.
VALID CONCLUSION: John cannot be a mother.

The first limitation of categorical reasoning is that it must assume both the major premise and the minor premise to be true. If either premise is not indeed true, then the conclusion would not necessarily follow. If we define man and woman by gender identity rather than the presence of a uterus, the aforementioned syllogisms don't work.

Dead-End Narrative: Logical Fallacies #2

There are also fallacies that occur, even when all the premises are true, if we switch the order of the three statements (i.e., swap the conclusion and the minor premise), as in these examples.

MAJOR PREMISE: All mothers are women.
MINOR PREMISE: Gloria is a woman.
FALLACIOUS CONCLUSION: Gloria is a mother.

MAJOR PREMISE: All mothers are women.
MINOR PREMISE: Johanna is not a mother.
FALLACIOUS CONCLUSION: Johanna is not a woman.

Maybe Gloria and Johanna are not yet mothers but will be after they stop using birth control. Maybe they are infertile women who have not looked into adoption. Having these other possible explanations limits the interpretive value of categorical reasoning.

Such fallacies can lead us into inappropriate categorization of certain objects, and that could lead to an action thinking that it will have a certain result that does not come about. So, we might reduce our own utilitarian relevance by relying upon such logical fallacies.

For example, suppose you are a poor boy from the inner city, and you want to be rich.

MAJOR PREMISE: All professional basketball players are rich.
MINOR PREMISE: I want to be rich.
FALLACIOUS CONCLUSION: I want to be a professional basketball player.

This can lead the young man to develop a dead-end narrative, certainly if he cannot jump. But even if he has some "game," the odds are too long in most cases. There are more Black surgeons than there are Black professional basketball players; it is just that the latter category is more visible. The young man in question would have a better chance with the narrative that he should pursue a career which focuses on his talents or opportunities (e.g., entrepreneurship).

Dead-End Narrative: Prejudice toward Others

A greater problem with such categorical reasoning, especially when using false premises or fallacious reasoning, is that it leads to prejudice against categories of people, and subsequent discriminatory behavior towards them.

Go back to that same young man in the inner city who desires to become wealthy. Let's suppose he follows his skill sets and interests and studies law. While in law school he volunteers at various legal clinics and does internships at different sites and then decides that his abilities and interests most correspond with corporate law. He graduates high in his class and then applies to some large firms. If those firms fallaciously think:

MAJOR PREMISE: All good Black lawyers are in criminal law.
MINOR PREMISE: This guy is not interested in criminal law.
FALLACIOUS CONCLUSION: This guy is not a good lawyer.

This particular fallacy is rooted in a faulty major premise, but it is one that might be held by many people, since they easily come up with many examples of good criminal attorneys who are Black but are less familiar with the other specialties within the practice of law. This prejudice then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as promising Black lawyers are steered into criminal law (or women are guided out of certain specialties within engineering).

Dead-End Narrative: Fragility of Group Identification

Back in tribal times, the cohesion of the group was paramount. It was essential that each individual thought of himself or herself as first and foremost, a member of the tribe. This collective identification was necessary for the survival of the group in the face of the threats posed by nature or warring tribes. A member of the Buffalo Hunters tribe would not have pondered, "Perhaps I should move out to San Diego and be part of the Clam Gatherers: better food, better climate, less stress." But now that we live in diverse cities, tribal identity makes less sense in terms of utilitarian relevance. Indeed, over-identification with one's categories tends to be problematic, reflecting only ulterior relevance.

As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, it is necessary for us to assume social roles and to define ourselves in terms of those roles. However, identifying with a larger category is something less necessary, and much less healthy. Whenever you fill out an online job application, you have to describe yourself within so many sets of categories: ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, disability. The number of options within each set continues to increase (e.g., the checkboxes are no longer just male and female), and so do the sets of categories (Hispanic has morphed into Latinx and is now a separate category from race). What is important is the distinction between checking a box to describe oneself and actually building a personal identity based on that category.

Although I (TLB) have been teaching mostly online for over two decades, I have loved having office hours so that I can get to know students

face-to-face. (It turns out that most students take online classes not because of physical distance from campus, but due to the convenience of asynchronous delivery.) What has been most reassuring to me is that even though most of my students would check the following boxes

- Female
- Hispanic
- Disabled (e.g., physical, mental, learning),

Those categories are not consciously acknowledged as the foundations of individual identity. It is not that my students are denying what they are (or even the impact of such background factors on how they think and act), it is just that my students are not defining themselves by these limiting categories. When I listen to my students' narratives, I hear something like "I'm a single mom, working as a CNA, but I made it through Dr. Truong's anatomy & physiology class, so I'm confident I can pass your class and get into a BSN program." These women are defining themselves by their current (and future) roles, by past accomplishments and future aspirations, not by genitalia, skin color, where their ancestors were born, or what part of their bodies may not be working that well. This kind of narrative embraces the future self and is not stuck in the confines of the past self.

Lolly, a student in her thirties, came into my office many times before she transferred to the University of Redlands. Sometimes she would have a pair of forearm crutches, but frequently she was in a wheelchair. The topic of our conversation was always how she was going to succeed in my course, and her career path (to become a counselor). It wasn't until her third or fourth visit that she shared the reason for her paralysis. Three years previously, she had her own beauty salon in San Bernardino, when she was hit by a drive-by shooter. After two years of rehab, she could be strong enough some days to get around without the wheelchair. The only other time we mentioned her limitations of mobility was when we discussed the University of Redlands campus not being as barrier-free as that of Cal State San Bernardino. She eventually graduated from the U of R and went on to Cal State for graduate work in counseling leading to eventual licensing as a Marriage and Family Therapist.

Years later, after earning her MFT license, she came back to my office to visit. At first, I did not recognize her. She was in her early forties by then, but also much thinner, better dressed, and with a single walking cane instead

of the two forearm crutches. She recounted her accomplishments and then thanked me for my part in her trajectory. "You never saw me as just a person in a wheelchair, you just saw *me*. You never thought of me as a disabled woman taking some courses to pass the time. You saw my potential, not my limitations." I relished her comments, perhaps because my narrative has always been that of a mentor, focused on the future potential, not as a dispenser of pity to those suffering the injustices of a cruel world.

Fortunately, Lolly's focus on her future is not an exception. Most of my students could categorize themselves in several ways as marginalized or disadvantaged, but that is not their identity. There are a few cases that go the other way, though.

Bella was in her early twenties. She only came to my office once and did not say that much. So, most of what I know about her comes from piecing together what I saw in the classroom or the online discussion board. She attempted my General Psychology course twice. The first time it was an evening, onground class, so I was able to observe her interaction with the other students (before she dropped out after about three weeks). The second time it was online, and she made a couple of discussion board posts before ceasing all activity. (So, she never passed the class, either on ground or online).

Bella first came on my "classroom radar" when I saw how she interacted with the other students. On this particular evening, before class had formally started, Bella began gesturing and shouting expletives at some other students. My initial assessment was that this was not just an agitated response to auditory hallucinations (I have had some students before who were under-medicated schizophrenics) but this was more sociological. I inferred a potential conflict between rival gangs: most likely Bella was responding to a perceived slight or threat. Nothing Bella said in her written work, or her subsequent postings on the discussion board, indicated any healthy narrative related to future career aspirations. Bella's identity seemed to be confined to her gang membership. This would be the logical syllogism behind her actions.

MAJOR PREMISE: All members of the North Side Rangers must act with bravery and defiance.

MINOR PREMISE: I am a member of the NSR.

VALID CONCLUSION: I will act with bravery and defiance.

This is so logical, but so dysfunctional. Every little misunderstood comment or action is perceived as a slight or threat and triggers retaliation.

ANTECEDENT: If someone slights me.
CONSEQUENT: Then I will respond aggressively.

What is dead-end here is not a fallacy of logic, but the dead-end narrative it sustains, the ulterior relevance of getting one's sense of worth from membership in a gang.

It was because of cases like Bella's that our college finally developed a Behavioral Intervention Team. The BIT springs into action in cases of cheating, mental illness, suicide risk, or violence assessment. Working with local law enforcement, BITs foil mass shootings on campus and refer dozens of other students to preventive counseling. If students can get out of the dead-end narratives that limit their identities, they can be helped. But the best way to get out of a dead-end narrative is to create a healthy one, and that requires some in-depth counseling.

Inductive Logic: The Method of Science

The human linguistic capacity to tell stories and categorize also involves a capacity to see patterns and infer causation. Indeed, the statement "If X then Y" implies that Y is the effect and X is a cause sufficient to produce that effect. "Because event X happened in my past, I now engage in this Y behavior."

Deductive logic works great if we have stone tablets, signed parchments, or laws published on a website. That becomes the generalization that will be applied to individual cases, the prototypical "if / then" conditional statement, the major premise of the deductive syllogism.

However, this is at best a way of applying edicts coming from on high. It is not science and not capable of independently affirming the truth of the premises (or the original "if/then" conditional statement).

Notice that categorical deductive reasoning only deals with major premises that begin with a word like *all*, *only*, or *no*. In the real world, the situation usually involves statements beginning with the word *some*.

What began during the Renaissance and developed more fully in the period known as the European Enlightenment was the rise of modern

science. This has been a never-ending quest to successively approximate truth by means of empirical observations (i.e., objective observation of external natural phenomena). The role of science in the development of personal narratives is not immediately apparent. Historically, the first role of such data was to cast doubt upon some narratives that were overly tied to literal interpretation of some religious myths. But the crafting of new narratives is still largely a function of affect rather than logic.

We have previously made the point that emotion is prior to reason and that ethical judgements are largely independent of scientific evidence (since such judgments are more about values than facts).

Narratives more often choose the facts than facts choose the narratives. Science is supposed to be objective, focused on objects which exist and can be observed, that which *does* happen, not on what *should* happen. In the words of evolutionary psychologist Frans de Waal "Science is not in the business of spelling out the meaning of life, and even less in telling us how to live our lives."

While it is true that science deals with the realm of facts, there are several unavoidable points of contact with values (particularly in the form of ethics).

1. Most fields of science involve applications (technology) whose material consequences have an impact on utilitarian relevance.
2. The social sciences can also study values as a topic of investigation. Research questions might include the degree to which certain attitudes are consistent with certain ethical perspectives.
3. Social science research involves human subjects and there are unavoidable ethical considerations: informed consent, confidentiality, and risk avoidance.

Now that we have acknowledged that connection with values, let's re-emphasize that science's greatest commitment must be to seeking truth via empirical data, and that scientific method should not be distorted by any concerns for possible implications on value. If I am a devout theist, I would not be a good scientist if I faked some data in hopes of supporting the doctrinal approach of my church. Indeed, I also hope that my church avoids doctrinal statements that are subject to empirical testing, such as:

*   God the Father is about 6 feet tall and tips the scales at 200 pounds

- Heaven is located on the largest moon of Jupiter
- Median time in purgatory is 137 years for three confessed mortal sins

Science is a method for obtaining a different kind of knowledge - the empirical - requiring observation of the external world, rather than contemplation of inner ideas. This approach works well for biology, chemistry, and physics, but not theology. The Holy Spirit cannot be seen in a microscope, heaven cannot be found with a telescope, and original sin cannot be verified in a DNA lab.

Rather than using deductive reasoning, science requires a different approach to logic - induction. While deductive reasoning starts by stating major and minor premises, and then delivers a verdict about a specific instance (the conclusion), inductive reasoning starts by examining specific cases. The conclusion may be in the form of a general rule, which is supported by the data. Induction's conclusion is always tentative, always open to the possibility that new data will require a modification of the conclusion. So, the classic example of the mortality of Socrates would look something like this if we put it into an inductive statement.

OBSERVATION #1: Socrates, a man, died.
OBSERVATION #2: Plato, a man, died.
OBSERVATION #3: Aristotle, a man, died.
TENTATIVE CONCLUSION: All men are mortal, and will die eventually.

So, why are we tentative? A good scientist is always open to viewing additional data from new cases, as well as considering alternative explanations.

- Maybe this just applies to males?
- Maybe there was a plague in Athens during the 4th century B.C.E.? That's why *those* men died.
- Maybe there was something deadly that Socrates transmitted to his student (Plato) that was then transmitted to his student (Aristotle)? Maybe it was a fatal case of philosopher cooties that killed about two decades after transmission?

Notice how these questions limit the scope of the conclusion to one sex, or one time period, or one location. As we get data from women, from other epochs, and other geographical locations, we can become more confident in the universality of our conclusion that all men are mortal. This is why having a larger sample, and a more representative sample, leads to better science.

Unfortunately, inductive reasoning is also subject to some logical fallacies that serve to limit many lay understandings of science.

Dead-End Narrative: Confirmation Bias

One of the first things taught in General Psychology is that case studies prove nothing. We use them to illustrate how to conduct a diagnostic interview, how to perform psychotherapy, and the complexity of patient backgrounds. However, case studies can never prove a specific cause of a mental disorder, the validity of an assessment tool, or the effectiveness of a treatment. For those tasks, we need larger samples (and for effectiveness, a randomized control trial experiment).

Invariably, one of the students will ask, "Well, if one case study is not enough, but I see several all indicating the same trend, is that enough to prove something"? The short answer is no, not unless we have designed a systematic survey with statistical analysis. The key is to examine other possible factors that might account for the results.

Otherwise, we could be committing the inductive fallacy of confirmation bias (Stanovich, 2009; Leavitt, 2015). This is the tendency to seek additional information that is consistent with our present belief (and ignore or disregard data that challenge current ideas). In other words, confirmation bias occurs when we count confirmatory cases, but not disconfirmatory cases.

Confirmation bias is at the center of the maintenance of most stereotypes, especially those related to race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Suppose your cousin Tim is a bit of a homophobe. "All gay guys are hairdressers," he bellows at the Thanksgiving dinner table. If you ask him to prove it, he is ready with a couple of examples. "My ex-girlfriend had this guy, Flashy Freddy, and remember the swish that Grandma had fix her hair back in Hoboken?" Between now and next Thanksgiving, Cousin Tim might notice a couple more examples and he will remember those cases because they confirm the stereotype he holds. What Tim will be less likely to

remember is the gay guy who is a truckdriver or the straight firefighter who helps at a beauty salon on his days off from the fire station.

	Hairdresser	Not a hairdresser
Gay	confirmatory	disconfirmatory
Straight	disconfirmatory	confirmatory

A scientific survey takes a representative sample of the population and looks for the (supposedly) correlated variables in every single case, so that each case can be categorized in one of the four cells above. Tim is only going to remember the cases that fit into the gay hairdresser category even though the disconfirmatory cells will be much larger.

Confirmation bias allows Tim to maintain his prejudice by rejecting science. Why does he do this? Perhaps his narrative is something like "I may be just a semi-skilled construction worker, but at least I'm not one of those homo hairdressers." Tim needs to find more meaning in his job and other relationships, and not try to find it in a sham sense of superiority based on sexual orientation, the epitome of ulterior relevance.

Dead-End Narrative : Ad Hoc Explanations

Scientific knowledge has two key components: data and theory. Each observed bit of information is a datum. So, data = facts. Don't think of theory as "made up" data. Theory is no substitute for data. A theory is a conceptual explanation for the data. The purpose of a theory is to help us summarize and understand the data. A theory can help us predict what data we expect to derive from a research design (i.e., generate a hypothesis). Theories can also help us develop technology, in which we use science to control future results in the service of utilitarian relevance.

Scientific Knowledge = Data + Theory

Theory without data is only idle speculation, but data without theory would be nothing more than meaningless trivia.

Science advances both by accumulating more (and better) data as well as by testing new theories against those data (and rejecting the theories that cannot explain the data. Philosopher Karl Popper (1963) understood

scientific theories to be the ones that could generate an empirically testable hypothesis. If the theory was so flexible that it could explain away disconfirmatory data, then it is not really a scientific theory.

One fatal flaw for a scientific theory would be being so loose that it could explain any possible empirical outcome. That would mean that any possible result of an experiment could be seen as confirming the theory behind the initial hypothesis (if we just loosen up the theory enough).

Rumberto used to sell timeshares. Now he conducts weekend seminars. He does not claim to be a psychotherapist, psychologist, or other mental health professional (because he knows that would run afoul of state laws). He does not claim to cure any specific mental disorders, but the implication is that if you are depressed or anxious, you need to spend a weekend with Rumberto. The "treatment" includes going into a hot tub, putting your head underwater, and screaming at your mother for not changing your diaper sooner. A few of Rumberto's clients will report that they feel much better afterward. He proclaims "You see, another testimonial. This treatment works because all people have an unresolved Dirty Diaper Complex." Most of his clients probably feel that although the hot tub was relaxing, they are just as nervous a week later, and the relationship with their mothers has not improved. Rumberto can say "Obviously, your case had a deeper and more enduring Dirty Diaper Complex. More treatment is necessary." No matter the result, Rumberto has an answer. Even if you said, "I never had a problem with my mother changing my diapers, why do I have to go through this?" Rumberto could say "You are just in denial. You really need this treatment just to recognize your repressed Dirty Diaper Complex."

The conclusion we should form is that Rumberto's diaper narrative might be an effective sales pitch, but it would not qualify as scientific theory.

Dead-End Narrative: Post Hoc Fallacies

Good science relies upon more than a string of cherry-picked anecdotes, presented in such a fashion as to sell snake oil. Most published psychological research is in the form of surveys in which the samples are large and representative, and variables are measured with valid, reliable, and precise tools. However, short of a randomized control trial experiment, we should be doubtful about claims of treatment efficacy.

Here we are talking of the logical fallacy known by its Latin phrase: *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. To put it into a conditional statement: X before Y, therefore Y because of X. Even when two events have an invariable sequence: an X before every Y, and a Y after every X, we should not jump to the conclusion that X is the *cause* of Y.

Correlations are certainly useful in scientific analysis. They help us

- Develop valid and reliable assessments
- Predict the presence (or absence) of one variable from the presence (or absence) of another
- Infer the likely etiology (origin) of a disease

However, *correlation is not causation*, and should not take the place of a randomized control trial when it comes to proving the effectiveness of a new treatment. We can set up this research on a two-by-two contingency table.

	Patient recovered	Patient not recovered
Treatment given	Treatment looks adequate	Treatment not adequate
Treatment not given	Treatment not essential	Treatment looks essential

Could Rumberto's "treatment" survive such scrutiny? Easily, especially if Rumberto was in charge of determining whether a given patient was cured. This is why we would need something more objective - a valid and reliable measure of the patient's recovery.

But there would be an even more serious flaw to such a correlational design: the post hoc fallacy. Let's look at a hundred cases of depression, all adults aged 50 to 70. Let's give each research subject an assessment for depression using a scale that is accepted as valid and reliable (e.g., the Beck Depression Inventory, the Zung Self-rating Scale, the Geriatric Depression Scale). This preliminary screening would establish that we have a hundred real cases of depression. Then we ask, "Who wants to spend a weekend with Rumberto"? Let's suppose that 40 hands go up, and they get to do some underwater weekend screaming. On Monday we give everyone the same depression scale again to see how many have recovered, and suppose we get these numbers.

	Patient recovered	Patient not recovered
Treatment given	30	10
Treatment not given	10	50

It looks like three-quarters of those who went with Rumberto got better, but only 17% of those who did not get to scream underwater improved. So, the numbers prove a *correlation* between screaming and recovery. Does that prove that Rumberto's treatment works? No! Correlation is not causation. Here's why.

For any strong, statistically significant correlation between variables X and Y, there are three possible explanations.

- X caused Y
- Y caused X
- Both X & Y are merely collateral effects of some lurking variable Z

In the above example, maybe the patient was getting better anyway, and because he was coming out of the depression, he was more open to the idea of the underwater screaming. Another possibility is that maybe there is an underlying personality profile (e.g., the trait of openness) that serves as lurking variable Z, making the patient both more interested in spending the weekend with Rumberto and also predisposing the patient to a rapid remission of depression symptoms regardless of what treatment is applied. High levels of openness facilitate rapid development of new narratives, and that is what we could be seeing here.

To substantiate a claim of treatment effectiveness, modern science requires a randomized, double-blind placebo, clinical trial. This involves three criteria not seen in the above correlational study.

1. Randomized assignment of each patient to treatment or non-treatment (the individual does not get to choose)
2. The non-treatment (control) group gets some alternative treatment (placebo) to control for their expectations
3. Neither the patients nor the mental health professionals rating the patients' improvement know who is getting treatment and who is getting a placebo. So, the patients getting dunked might (falsely) wonder "Maybe we are just the placebo group, and the other group is getting Prozac?" (This is what we call the double-blind study.)

Until we get data from randomized clinical trials, we have to worry that the *post hoc* fallacy (like *ad hoc* hypotheses and confirmation bias case studies) is going to make a lot of quack treatments look good.

Dead-End Narrative: Determinism

In a previous chapter, we demonstrated that determinism (i.e., the denial of free will) is a dead-end narrative from the perspective of ethics. Many scientists have accepted the doctrine of determinism, but we declare that determinism can also be declared a dead-end narrative from a strictly scientific perspective.

This is especially true for those schools of psychology (physiological, behavioral) that attempt to reduce human behavior, emotion, and even thought to purely material forces beyond our choice. Indeed, determinists regard "choice" itself as but an illusion, a subjective experience of a preference determined by external or internal material forces. Behaviorism's founder, John Watson (1958), once boasted that simple stimulus and response regimens could create whatever type of human personality we wanted.

"Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. I am going beyond my facts and I admit it, but so have the advocates of the contrary and they have been doing it for many thousands of years."

A later behaviorist, B.F. Skinner, envisioned a utopian society in which targeting prosocial behavior to receive the rewards of simple positive reinforcement would obtain the requisite good conduct (Skinner, 1948). Indeed, Skinner (1971) viewed any assumption that people had free will as a delusion.

Some contemporary neuroscientists also embrace this deterministic perspective. Sam Harris (2012) views the human as a mere puppet on a biochemical string. Rather than meticulously explain how all these molecules and proteins result in thought and decisions, Harris simply dismisses the alternative of free will as incoherent: it "cannot be mapped on to any conceivable reality." There are some less extreme views of the

balance of thought and physiology (Gazzaniga, 2011) or of evolution and intension (Dennett, 1984), but we contend that hard determinism is a dead-end narrative. Indeed, determinism is an example of many of the types of dead-end narratives already discussed.

Confirmation bias likes to point to examples (if they fit the theory being promoted). So, the determinists say, "we can explain perspiration as a physiological response, completely understandable by measuring variables such as temperature, hydration and salinity." B.F. Skinner even tried to explain religion by doing a case study of a pigeon who was conditioned to hop on one foot (Skinner's operational definition of a ritual, but I doubt that would explain refined theological distinctions). Simple reflexes may be explained by genetics or conditioning. Indeed, there may be very few human decisions that are not *influenced* by the needs of the body and previous experiences, but what is the use of maintaining that some unknown permutation of unmeasurable factors completely determines all thought and behavior, such that there is no room for a personal will?

The determinists will say that although research has not (yet) given us a precise multivariate regression equation of the input of all these independent variables (the genes, the intrauterine environment in which the fetus developed, the classical conditioning, the operant conditioning, the modeling) there *must* be determinism because there is no room for free will, and we know that there is no room for free will because all these other factors will explain everything, we just don't know exactly how yet. That circular argument is no more convincing coming from determinists than it is coming from religious fundamentalists: God exists because the Bible says so, and we know the Bible is true because it is the word of God.

Each new volume of peer-reviewed scholarly research coming out in journals published by the American Psychological Association and the Association for Psychological Science attempts to find new links between behavior and some of these independent variables (internal biochemistry and external stimuli). Sometimes, one of these factors can account for ten percent of the variance (under the right conditions). If it does, the determinists can say, "You see we have nailed down one factor determining a (small) area of human behavior (under certain conditions)." Of course, if future studies fail to replicate these findings, or introduce other qualifying variables, the determinists will retreat to, "Well that doesn't prove free will; something else must be the underlying cause."

The stance smacks of an *ad hoc* hypothesis. Perhaps the free will question is no more amenable to scientific resolution than theological questions about the origin of the soul, the Trinitarian doctrine of the Deity, or the role of purgatory in the afterlife. If both sides can look at the same data set and bend the interpretation, can data resolve the competition between theories? Can the determinists ever design a randomized control trial experiment that would resolve the question conclusively? If not, could their rigid adherence to the doctrine of determinism reflect an underlying commitment to some dead-end narrative?

Determinists also fall into the post hoc fallacy when interpreting correlational data. A great example would be Benjamin Libet's (2004) research. Although often referred to as a laboratory experiment, it was not a randomized control trial. No independent variable was manipulated. There was simply an electronic measurement of brain activity and an opportunity for the subject to report when a decision was made. (Two measured variables can be correlated, but correlation is not causation). Libet's research found that brain activity could be identified a fraction of a second before the individual could consciously report that a decision had been made. The inference made by the determinists is that the brain activity obviously preceded the conscious awareness of the decision, so therefore it must have caused the decision. That is a classic example of *post hoc* reasoning. Perhaps there is some lurking variable resulting in both the brain activity and the reporting of the decision. One of these effects (the brain activity) is observed before the other, but that does not mean that it causes the other.

Going back to a previous chapter, we contended that free will is an essential concept for an ethical perspective. Sam Harris (2010) tried to explain how a purely scientific approach could yield moral guidelines (without relying upon a God to set those guidelines, or an individual will to follow those guidelines). Although we find his rhetoric unconvincing on these key points, there is much to recommend his work. We agree that the pursuit of science requires the affirmation of certain values and should be conducted according to ethical guidelines. We further agree that "science can tell us which values lead to human flourishing." However, Harris never satisfactorily justifies that giant leap from *is* to *ought*: why should we commit to human flourishing over other values? Sam Harris cannot supply the answer, but our second chapter did: because those values involve ultimate relevance. Since all values are created, creativity and agency are ultimate. But that explanation excludes determinism.

Chapter 5

Psychology: How It Became the Study of Narratives and Willpower

Rather than declaring science and free will as incompatible, our claim in this book is that the development of psychology over the last century and a half has been the development of a scientific investigation of the human will. Rather than dismissing the human will as a figment of romantic hope, we view willpower as a concept that can be studied empirically and employed therapeutically (McGonigal, 2013).

Until about a hundred years ago, psychology was defined as "the study of the mind." Indeed, it was little more than a branch of philosophy fueled by introspection and armchair speculation about human nature. Psychology began as the study (*ology*) of the mind (*psyche*), but it was John Watson who pointed out that a purely introspective reflection on our own thoughts was insufficiently precise or objective to qualify as science. It was Watson who redefined psychology as that which could be studied scientifically, or at least more objectively and precisely, which meant *observable behavior* rather than speculative mind. Behaviorists such as Watson and Skinner preferred to observe the simple behaviors of animals in cages and then make great leaps of inference about why humans were doing what they were doing.

Later generations of psychological scientists have given us a reformulated definition of psychology as the *scientific study of behavior and mental processes.* We contend that in the future, psychology will come to be defined as *the scientific study and modification of narratives.*

The so-called "replication crisis" in psychology should be conceived as a *replication revelation* that the extreme uniqueness of persons precludes inter-subject reliability - people differ too much from each other when it comes to personality and behavior. This may also reflect how people change their narratives throughout the lifespan (test-retest reliability).

This is not a problem of precision or validity, but a recognition of the richness of human experience and behavior. Some people are adept at using their willpower, while others are mostly lacking. Even those who employ

willpower skillfully in certain situations might struggle in other contexts. The study of psychology (whether clinical or consumer or industrial) is the study of how people use their willpower, and how we can help them use it better by modifying their narratives.

Academic psychology in the U.S. begins with the American Functionalist, William James. Although medically trained, and an instructor of physiology, James refused to reduce the complexities of human consciousness by only referring to the physiological antecedents or concomitants.

James (1890) acknowledged the role of physiological arousal in generating and sustaining emotions, but he never argued that it was the sole cause of emotional experience. Indeed, subsequent psychologists have pointed out many other factors influencing the experience of emotion (and subsequent behavior). As we saw in the last chapter, James remained an advocate of free will, and in many ways set the course for modern psychology's evolving approach as well. This approach is between these two extreme doctrines.

- Factors beyond our control completely determine our choices and efforts
- Each human always has the ability to act freely by choosing to employ the force of willpower, thus overcoming all physiological and external influences

Over a hundred years after the death of James, we advocate that middle position as a statement of the human condition and are committed to increasing the degree of willpower for our clients.

After examining over a thousand dementia patients, I (TLB) have seen individuals at both extremes of willpower. Some had brains so ravaged by neurofibrillary plaque that they could not will their bladders to contain urine or will their mouths to chew and swallow the food they had been spoon fed. But I have also had a few patients who were almost as disabled by severe depression but managed to regain the willpower necessary to perform such tasks, reason clearly, and recover the capacity to experience pleasant emotions.

We see the history of psychology over the last century as an attempt to understand and promote the role of willpower.

Psychoanalysis started off as quite deterministic. Freud tried to comprehend the mental disorders he encountered by referring to his 19th century understanding of neurology and a simple hydrodynamic homeostatic model of mental energy: too much "psychic energy" and you get hysteria, too little and you get neurasthenia. Following the theoretical path laid out by Charcot and Breur, Freud initially relied on emotional catharsis to release the pressure of built-up energy.

Freud gradually replaced hypnosis with talk therapy. In the early 20th century Freud developed his structural model of the mind into *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The *id* was the dangerous repository of those sexual and aggressive energies that should not be given uncontrolled release (but should not be allowed to build up, either). The *superego* was an internalized conscience that sought to repress the lustful and aggressive urges coming out of the *id*, but bottling them up could make things worse (neurosis or psychosis).

By the 1920s Freud had it figured out: between the *id* and the *superego*, there develops the *ego*, a rational balancer. The *ego* has to negotiate the internal conflict between *superego* and the *id* (pleasure principle) with the limitations imposed by external contexts (reality principle). The *ego* had to replace the *primary process* thought ("I want it and I want it now") of the *id* with the *secondary process* of the *ego* ("I should wait until it is more appropriate"). Gradually, Freud changed his understanding of what was going on therapeutically with his patients. He reframed psychoanalysis as a process of strengthening the *ego* so that it might stand up to irrational, dangerous demands of both the *id* and the *superego*.

Alfred Adler, though trained as an ophthalmologist and actively engaged in the general practice of medicine, had become president of the local Viennese Psychoanalytic Society. By 1912 Adler perceived Freud's influence on the movement as authoritarian. Adler formally left the movement and started a new movement - Individual Psychology. He replaced the controversial Oedipus Complex with *inferiority feeling*: all children must deal with the awareness of their inferiority because they are born children in an adult world. Adler recognized the impact of physical disability, socioeconomic status, racial prejudice, antisemitism, and poor parenting (the most important factor) on inferiority feeling.

However, Individual Psychology shifted the focus from the problems of the past to the potential for healthy development. "Social interest" (the most common English translation of Adler's *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) was an

altruistic, pro-social orientation that an individual achieved while working within the contexts of friends, family, and career. Most children learn these skills when exposed to good parenting practices or other nurturing social institutions (e.g., school, church, places of employment). Psychotherapy and social work have to fill in the gaps.

Adler and his followers came out clearly against any kind of deterministic view of human nature. No matter how bad the genes or how many adverse childhood experiences, people can always embrace healthier "guiding fictions" (what we are here calling *narratives*). Adler considered mental disorders as being stuck in a private logic that assuages feelings of inferiority, but at the cost of a neurosis. "The neurotic is nailed to the cross of his fiction." This is what we are calling the dead-end narrative. The application of Adlerian therapeutic principles to geriatric patients is covered in greater depth in another writing (Brink, 1979).

A year after Adler's departure, Freud experienced the defection of his designated heir, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who also found fault with Freud's authoritarian leadership of the psychoanalytic movement. Although Jung enthusiastically embraced Freud's use of dream analysis and much of the psychoanalytic terminology (e.g., *ego*, *libido*, *unconscious*) Jung was convinced that the real challenge within the human mind was more than a few bizarre sexual fantasies. Jung contended that there was a deeper level of the unconscious (the collective) and that dreams could tap into the archetypal energy of that deepest level, making that energy accessible to the developing *ego*, thereby propelling the individuation process. So, instead of viewing the individual as a victim of a personal past, the individual could be the beneficiary of all the ancestral growth of the human species - all the healthy narratives that have been developed by previous generations and encoded into our culture (if not encoded into our very DNA as Jung came close to suggesting).

The next major defection from Freud was Otto Rank, who had been one of the first non-physicians to join Freud's inner circle. (Rank had a doctorate in literature.) When Adler and Jung defected, Freud relied on this prolific young writer to help defend the mentor's positions. Gradually, Rank (1978) found his own voice and developed his version of "Will Therapy."

But despite the defections of the aforementioned major figures in psychoanalysis, many remained within the movement and accepted the lead of the founder until Sigmund Freud's death in 1939. The hereditary head of the psychoanalytic movement became his daughter, Anna Freud. She led the

ongoing development of "Ego Psychology" and inspired the work of Heinz Hartman, Ernst Kris, Rudolph Lowenstein, and David Rappaport. The trend was to de-emphasize the 19th century dynamic model (the energy of the *id*) and emphasize the growth of the *ego* to control those internal forces.

Outside of psychoanalysis, the other ongoing trend in psychiatry has been the biological emphasis, rooted in anatomy and physiology and developing into contemporary neuroscience and pharmacology. However, a careful reading of some of the major figures of this perspective also reveals an interest in social and cognitive aspects - there is still room for the transformative power of a personal narrative to harness the individual will and the social context.

One major figure of the early 20th century is Kurt Goldstein (1939), a neurologist who studied brain injured German soldiers after World War I. Although he greatly appreciated the role of the localization of the brain injuries and patients' social background factors in recovery, he never viewed his patients' conditions as merely the immutable outcomes of these factors. Goldstein developed workshops for teaching his patients interpersonal and occupational skills, and counted the majority of his cases as successes.

Another neurologist not affiliated with the psychoanalytic movement was Abraham Low (1984). A native of Poland who went to medical school in France, Low did his internship in Vienna, but was not attracted to the psychoanalytic movement. Low immigrated to the U.S. and taught neurology at U.S. medical schools in Illinois and Minnesota. In 1937 he founded Recovery, Inc. based upon what he called "training of the will." Although he worked primarily with schizophrenics and embraced the medical model, Low maintained that patients' willpower could be trained so that they could "command their muscles to move" and voluntarily choose to comply with the doctor's prescribed treatments. Low resisted exploration of the patient's "excuses" for continued psychotic behavior. Patients who did not immediately comply were not shamed or punished, but were told "You are still learning. You have not mastered it, yet" (what contemporary Positive Psychology understands as Carol Dweck's *Growth Mindset*).

Disenchantment with the psychoanalytic and biomedical (and behaviorist) perspectives led to the mid-20th-century development of the Humanistic movement within psychology. Abraham Maslow, inspired by Goldstein and Adler's commitment to a holistic view of the individual, came up with the pyramid of needs in the pursuit of self-actualization. Individuals who were stuck down at the primary level of the physiological needs didn't

have very much latitude when it came to choosing what to do next: "I need to breathe, then I can think about building a shelter from the storm." Self-actualization is a luxury that comes after we have met safety, social, and esteem needs as well as the physiological. Will and creativity develop as we move up the pyramid of needs, and only blossom when we function at the highest, self-actualized level.

Gordon Allport (1937) was a social psychologist who developed methods for studying personality and attitudes. He noted the limitations of different methods (introspection, case studies, surveys, experiments) as well as the limitations of the medical, psychoanalytic, and behavioral perspectives. Although Allport acknowledged the role of biology, environmental stimuli, and childhood trauma in personality development, he argued against reducing each adult's uniqueness to a different combination of overpowering causes. Allport preferred to view each person as a functionally autonomous individual in a current context, where the individual can get beyond the factors that contributed to past development. Allport developed an interest in how individuals compose their own life story and suggested idiographic methodologies of exploring the narrated life history.

Carl Rogers (1961) brought this humanistic approach to person-centered psychotherapy. What really matters is not so much the patient's diagnosis or the background experiences, but how the individual perceives that reality. The key to successful therapy is empathy that accepts the client as a valued (and valuing) organism. We view this process as creating a safe space in which the client may create a healthy narrative.

Social psychology in the late 20th century looked more deeply into the interaction of the individual and the group. Solomon Asch performed a series of experiments on conformity with group beliefs. He put the card on the left (showing one line) on one side of the room, and the card on the right (showing three lines) on the other side of the room and then orally asked six young men whether the line on the left card approximated the length of line A, line B or line C.

The men answered aloud, sequentially, but the first five were confederates of the researcher: actors who had been scripted to respond incorrectly, by answering line A. The only real experimental subject was the last young man. The purpose of this research was to see how he would answer, given the wrong answers of all those who had previously replied. Each round of this experiment found that most subjects would conform to the group norm, giving the (wrong) answer of line A. Later versions of the experiment manipulated such variables as the lack of unanimity among the confederates and pre-trial assertiveness training for the subjects. Each of these factors (along with some background variables) could predict that a higher or lower number of subjects would conform to the group norms.

Asch was dissertation advisor to Stanley Milgram, who became most famous for the obedience study of delivering electric shocks to a person in the next room. Here one confederate played the role of an experimenter (E) investigating the role of aversive conditioning. The research subject was told to perform the role of the teacher (T) who would assign a task to a learner (L) and also provide the learner with an electric shock when the task was not performed correctly. Actually, the "learner" was just another researcher confederate - an actor who would pretend to fail the task and pretend to suffer the electric shock. So, no one was really learning a task, and no one was really getting shocked. The whole purpose of this study was to see how far the subject assigned to the "teacher" role (T) would go in administering these electric shocks. Even though the control panel said, "extreme danger" and the learner (L) had screamed and banged on the wall after the last shock, when the experimenter (E) told the subject (T) to administer the next shock, most subjects obeyed, giving (what they thought was) a higher and higher level of painful, even dangerous, electric shocks.

To put this into our terminology, the subjects readily assumed the narrative provided by the E confederate: that the subject should obey authority without any disruptive comments or questions.

Follow up experiments indicated that almost ninety percent of people (in role T) would provide the shocks when the subjects had repeatedly witnessed previous subjects carry out the complete shock sequence. However, this rate of compliance could be reduced greatly by such things as seeing a previous subject refuse to carry out the orders to provide a shock, or by having L and T meet before the beginning of the learning trials and exchange words and a handshake. Obedience varied according to these circumstances. Or, to rephrase this, the subject's capacity to willfully resist these commands could grow under these conditions.
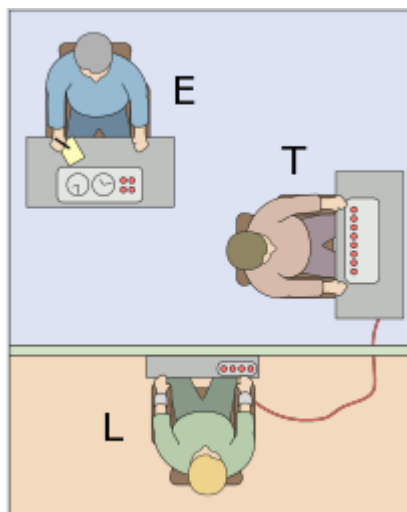
Milgram's boyhood friend from the Bronx was Phil Zimbardo, who conducted some of the later iterations of these obedience experiments. Zimbardo is most famous for his Stanford prison experiment. Male undergrad students agreed to spend a week in the basement of the psychology building and were assigned to the roles of "prisoners" or "guards." Would these loosely scripted roles become serious narratives affecting the emotional lives of these research participants?

In just a few days, the "guards" became quite brutal while the "prisoners" were overcome with high levels of anxiety. Zimbardo concluded

that authoritarian institutional norms could overwhelm the constraints normally found in the individual conscience. Now retired from teaching, Zimbardo spends his time with the Heroic Imagination Project in which individuals are trained to willfully resist such institutional pressures, speak up, and model individual heroism. This is the narrative that functions as an antidote to blind obedience: "I am a moral agent and will not let a corrupt organization corrupt my conscience."

If we could find the common thread in the research of Asch, Milgram, and Zimbardo, it is that most people will easily conform to group pressure, obey authority, and/or readily assume institutional values, even when they are immoral or obviously defy the truth of our own eyes. Unless we develop our own willpower grounded in our own narratives, we are too weak to resist.

Nick is in his final year of high school and is unfortunately prone to fall to peer pressure. Although he gets good grades, he's unproductive in his spare time. He used to be one of the school's star track runners, but over the last year, he has wanted to take part in the same activities as his friends.

When the ringleader of his circle of friends, Duncan, told Nick that he should attend a party instead of going to track practice one day after school, Nick was disappointed to miss the activity that he loved, but felt that he needed to do what Duncan was telling him to do to achieve high social status. Nick was questioned by his coach the next day and lied and told him he'd become sick. He promised he'd be at the next practice. However, high social status was more important to Nick than his athletic career, and this meant that Duncan was more important of an authority to him than his coach.

When the next athletic practice came up later in the week, and Nick was again invited by Duncan to a gathering of his friends, Nick weighed his options. His coach was relying on him to attend this time, and he *had* promised he'd be there. However, Duncan was really putting pressure on him to attend this social occasion.

It was a tough choice for Nick. Either way, he felt he'd be disappointing someone and also hurting himself. However, it just came down to who had the most sway over him. Since social status was more important to him than his athletic career, Duncan was a more influential authority figure to Nick than the coach.

Each time Duncan told Nick that he should attend a party, Nick attended. Drinking became his new favorite hobby, and Nick gradually lost the fitness

he'd worked hard to build up. Nick misses running and knows his parents are worried about his new social habits. That upsets him, but he has been swayed by the most influential authority figure in his life. This illustrates how easy it is for an adolescent to abdicate responsibility for sustaining his own narrative.

21st Century Psychology: The Cognitive Revolution

In the 19th century, the study of emotion did not get much beyond introspection and anecdotal case studies. The psychoanalytic hydraulic model is that the mind is like a water balloon - add too much pressure and it will burst (i.e., too much stored emotion will lead to uncontrolled behavior). Freud noticed that his hysterical patients (almost all of whom were women) would get better after having a profound emotional catharsis during a hypnotic or talk session. On the basis of such research, and reflections on his own dreams and emotions, Freud concluded that the mind stored up emotions, and if the pressure built up, the result was a burst, so it is better to therapeutically lower the pressure. This emotional storage hypothesis was never confirmed by randomized control trials. It just became dogma among generations of psychotherapists, in both the psychoanalytic and humanistic schools.

On the other hand, when William James studied his own stream of consciousness, he came up with a different cause-effect sequence. The experience of the emotion is actually the result of behavior (if we understand "behavior" as physiological arousal). In other words:

- we don't cry because we are sad; we are sad because we are crying
- we don't laugh because we are happy; we are happy because we are laughing
- we don't run away because we are afraid; we are afraid because we are running away
- we don't yell and scream because we are angry; we are angry because we are yelling and screaming.

External stimulus $\Rightarrow$ Physiological response $\Rightarrow$ Emotion

This theory was also advanced by a Danish physiologist, Friedrich Lange, and became known as the James-Lange theory. Unfortunately, it has also lacked confirmation by randomized control trials. However, there is a similarity to both the James-Lange model and the psychoanalytic hydraulic model - the lack of a role for narrative.

It was not until the mid-20th century that investigators had figured out how to operationally define emotions and manipulate the internal physiological factors and external situational factors in order to conduct some real experiments. Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer are credited with the *cognitive labeling theory* of emotion (also known as the two-factor theory). Their series of experiments involved the manipulation of variables such as physiological arousal, external stimulation, and cognitive understanding.

Consider this straight-forward experiment. Subjects are college students who are told that they will be given a test of vision. They have to go to the waiting room for ten minutes until it is their turn. Group H waits in a room in which a happy confederate has been planted. The actor pretends to be just another subject awaiting his turn, but actually his role is to make jokes, laugh and get everyone in a happy mood. Group M waits in a room in which an angry confederate has been planted. This actor pretends to be just another waiting student, but his role is to bad-mouth the university and get everyone mad. When the subjects come out of the waiting room, they have their vision tested (just so they think that was the real purpose of this study) but then they fill out a questionnaire to see just how happy or mad they have become. The results: people in Group H reported more happiness, while those in Group M were more likely to report being angry. So, the social stimuli provided by confederates H and M had an impact.

Now, let's make this research more complicated by including some potentially interacting variables. Let's give another sample of students an injection of something (a stimulant or a tranquilizer) and tell them we are trying to determine if it helps their vision. So, now we have four groups, with each subjected to a different combination of confederate and injection:

- HS injected with the stimulant, then in room with happy confederate
- HT injected with the tranquilizer, then in room with happy confederate
- MS injected with the stimulant, then in room with angry confederate

- MT injected with the tranquilizer, then in room with angry confederate

The results showed that the tranquilizer blunted emotions, both for those exposed to the happy or angry situations, while the stimulant seemed to intensify these emotions. So, both the external stimulus (H or M) and the internal physiological arousal of the injection (S or T) seemed to have an impact on the reported emotion (not only whether it was joy or anger, but on the level of the intensity of that emotion).

So far, these experiments have shown the impact of both social stimuli and internal biochemistry in determining emotions. So far, there is no role for narratives.

Now, let's complicate this research design with the third interacting variable of cognitive labeling - what the subjects *expect* to happen. So, let's take another sample of students and do the H or M rooms, give half the tranquilizer and half the stimulant, but now, let's correctly inform half of the subjects about their injection. Tell the stimulant subjects that they can expect some increase in heart rate; tell the tranquilizer patients that they should feel more relaxed. The other half of the patients will be misinformed, receiving a stimulant after being told to expect a tranquilizer or receiving a tranquilizer after being told to expect a stimulant. Now, we have eight groups (two to the third power: 2x2x2) because we have the three variables of the *room* (H or M), the actual *injection* (S or T) and what the subjects are *expecting* (S or T): HSS, HST, HTT, HTS, MSS, MST, MTT, MTS.

The most intense happiness and the most intense anger were experienced by the misinformed stimulant groups (HST & MST). They were expecting to feel relaxed due to the tranquilizer, but then their hearts started racing due to the stimulant. The label that made sense in describing their experience was the emotion given to them by the confederate in their room: "I feel pretty worked up, so I guess I am just really happy (or mad) because it can't be a tranquilizer that makes me feel this way." So, our emotions are not just the products of physiology and external stimulation, but also of our ideas (labels, expectations, narratives).

Consider the role of your expectation in this situation. You are running a little late and hope to make it to pick up your kids in twenty minutes. You just need to pick up one thing at the grocery store. You pop in, go right to the aisle, grab it without looking at the price, head right for the express line, and there is only one person in front of you. You are expecting to be out the door

in 90 seconds. But, things stall for the customer in front of you. There is a price check that takes several minutes to resolve. At last, her purchases are totaled, but her debit card does not go through, so she writes a check, and then wants to know if she can get some cash back. You are getting angry and fearful that you might not make it out in time to pick up your child. Things are finally resolved, and you are out the door in a total of seven minutes from the point of entry.

Now, consider the same situation, but instead of the grocery store, you duck into the post office. Past experience has led you to expect a ten-minute wait. The person in front of you has several packages and you initially wonder if he will take insurance and fill out reply forms. Things get resolved efficiently and you are out the door in a total of seven minutes from the point of entry. You are quite relieved.

The difference between the grocery store experience of anger and fear versus the post office experience of relief is not the amount of time (seven minutes) but beating the *expectation* of time. When expectations are defied, emotions intensify.

Timothy is a successful commodities trader just shy of forty. He is an only child who has never been married. He has never been in a serious relationship with a single mother. He has no nieces or nephews. He has just been matched up with Amy, a 30-year-old administrative assistant with an eight-year-old son. She learns about Timothy's background and decides that her having a child might scare him off, so she decides to conceal that fact, at least in the initial contact. The relationship clicks. She is able to conveniently leave her son with her parents for a couple of romantic weekend getaways with Timothy. Afterward, he brings up the idea of their moving in together. Now, she feels she can no longer conceal her status as a single mother. Tim's thoughts fall into this narrative: "She played me and thought that after I fell for her, she could get a new stepdad for her child. I cannot trust her."

Let's rerun the sequence of this relationship. On the first date, Amy reveals that she has a son. She even phrases it in a way that respects Timothy's right of refusal: "Do you have a policy about not dating single moms?" Amy now comes across as pleasant and honest, so Timothy takes the next step, and the next. It may take longer for him to conceive of a living together relationship (and at some point, he may decide that he is not comfortable with the stepdad role).

The difference in the course of this relationship (and Timothy's evolving narrative) is due to the factor of expectation. He is not being blindsided into

new responsibilities. He can maintain the narrative that Amy is honest, open, and respectful of his rights.

Another developing field of cognitive psychology has been the study of framing and decision making found in the research of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (2011). They found that most people are loss averse - less likely to accept a deal described in terms of loss than to accept that same deal when framed as a gain.
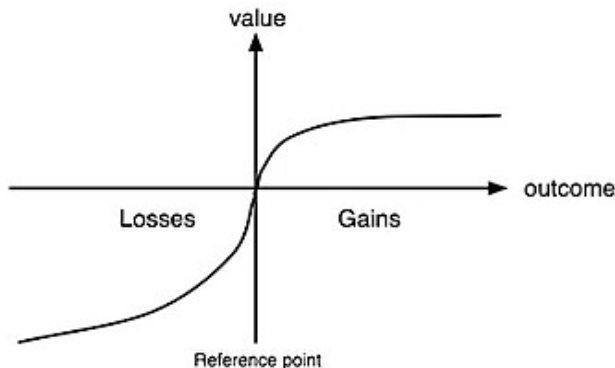
Kahneman and Tversky also found that, when people are stressed, they are more likely to respond quickly with using simple heuristics (thinking fast) even though this makes it more likely to commit logical fallacies such as confirmation bias and anchoring. However, people can be trained to engage in more careful and systematic decision making (thinking slowly). A key component of this training is a creative reframing of the problem to get us out of a loss aversion approach.

For the past four years, Lynn has been the caretaker of her 84-year-old mother, who is suffering from dementia. Lynn has come to doubt her ability to provide the level of care that her mother needs. Lynn's body aches, and she gets upset easily because she is so tired from waking up in the night. She wants the best for both of them, so she decides that it's time to hire somebody to help.

Lynn is nervous to bring the subject up to her mother because she knows that her mother, who can be very stubborn, won't like the idea. Lynn takes her mother out for lunch and brings up the subject of in-home care.

"I know you won't like this," she begins, "but I've been thinking about it for a while. It'll be difficult to adjust to, but I think it'll be for the best. I

think I need to hire someone to help me take care of you." Her mother gets angry, says she's not old enough to need that kind of help, and says she will refuse to interact with any caretaker that Lynn hires. Lynn also becomes upset and begins to cry. She is so tired that she doesn't have enough energy to handle this conflict well.

Let's look at the situation if Lynn had handled the conversation differently. Lynn takes her mother out for lunch and brings up the subject of in-home care.

"So, guess what? I know you've been wanting more company lately, so I've arranged for somebody to come by and hang out with you while she does some housework. I've been busy with work lately, so I need the extra help, anyway."

Her mother doesn't love the idea of a stranger coming to the house, but she *has* been wanting more company, and can't exactly refuse if Lynn says she needs the help. She grudgingly agrees.

Lynn has creatively reframed the problem of an old woman falling into cognitive decline (something her mother's narrative cannot address) to an opportunity that ties into the narrative of a sociable person.

Another development in cognitive psychology has been the application to psychotherapy. Although we have consistently acknowledged in previous chapters that humans are primarily emotional beings who happen to think, the evidence from clinical studies has accumulated to show that changing the way that a patient thinks (e.g., cognitive expectations, labels, interpretations) can change the experience of that patient's emotions - narratives change our expectations, and therefore the experience of the emotions.

Perhaps the real pioneers of cognitive therapy are Abraham Low (who just told the patients to command their muscles to move) and Alfred Adler (who reframed private logic away from inferiority feeling toward social interest). In the 1950s, it was another breakaway psychoanalyst, Albert Ellis, who called this form of treatment "rational-emotive therapy." Then in its 1970s iteration, psychiatrist Aaron Beck called it cognitive therapy.

Although the Behaviorism of John Watson and B.F. Skinner appears to fit the dead-end narrative of determinism, not all behavioral therapists fell into a dead-end when it came to treatment options. Neither Skinner nor Watson worked with mental patients, but later clinicians figured out how to apply the insights of conditioning to some of the real problems experienced by patients, e.g., systematic desensitization for phobias. Both Ellis and Beck had used behavior therapy with some of their depressed patients and found

that it fit nicely with their cognitive approach, and the new treatment became known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy. CBT (in conjunction with Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor medication) is the treatment of choice for depression. More recent iterations of CBT include such things as family therapy and mindfulness meditation. Dialectical Behavior Therapy combines mindfulness to treat cases of anxiety and even borderline personality. Patients are helped to increase their emotional regulation by recognizing the triggers to their emotional instability (Linehan, 2014).

Of course, the role of cognition (labeling, interpretive schema, expectations) in determining our emotions was not previously unknown. Philosophers, theologians, and wise intellectuals from various times and cultures had remarked on it. Martha Washington is credited with the reflection "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions and not upon our circumstances." I don't know if she was understanding dispositions as traits or expectations, but I think of them as our narratives.

Darwin, in his later work on human nature, *The Descent of Man,* reflected on the future development of refined willpower: "Man, prompted by his conscience, will through long habit acquire such perfect self-command, that his desires and passions will at last yield instantly and without a struggle to his social sympathies …" As Alfred Adler would put it - when we become oriented by social interest, our willpower can control our selfish desires.
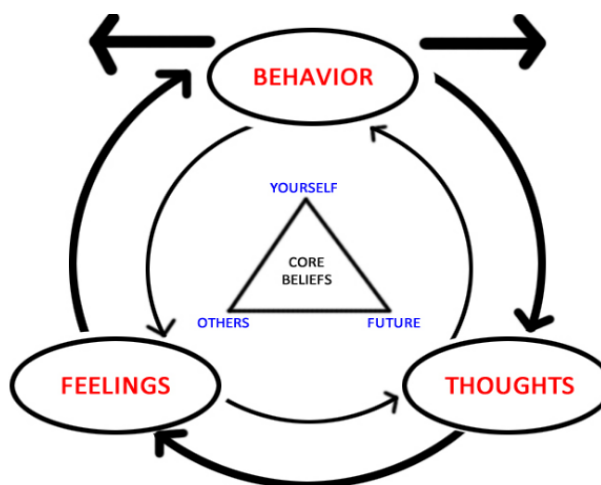
21ˢᵗ Century Psychology: Testing Is as Testing Does

Throughout the 20th century, psychology pushed for recognition as a legitimate science. One of the touchstones of empirical science is measurement that is precise, reliable, and valid. Each of these terms has a specific meaning and implies certain criteria. A *precise* measurement has numbers. It goes beyond mere categorization ("The patient is diagnosed as depressed.") It goes beyond assigning a level ("The patient is moderately depressed.") It needs a number (e.g., a score of 16 out of 30 on the Geriatric Depression Scale). That number can then be used in calculating correlation coefficients, for it is those correlation coefficients that are used to demonstrate reliability and validity.

Reliability only refers to the consistency of the scores produced by the test, and tells us nothing about the usefulness of the test or whether it is even measuring what it says it measures. Reliability means that the same patient taking the same test should get the same scores (or at least pretty close to the same) regardless of when the test is given, who administers the test, what is the format of the test, or which part of the test is involved.

Test-retest reliability says that if you take the test today and again next week, you should get a similar score. That makes sense if we are measuring something that should not change (e.g., height, a personality trait, IQ). If we find a discrepancy in the scores, that implies that there is something wrong with the test. But much of what is most important to measure are things that we expect to change (e.g., weight, approval, productivity, knowledge), and for which we need instruments sensitive enough to monitor such change.

Another form of reliability is *inter-rater*: if two different judges are scoring an individual on the same test, they should agree. Here the implication is that if agreement is low, there is something wrong with the rating instrument being used. Is that what we assume when two movie critics disagree? Should we just have them rate movies on a 0 to 10 scale instead of one to five stars? Is that how we fix it with greater precision? My (TLB) experience on dozens of hiring committees is that we are given these little composite numerical scales for assessing each applicant. If we end a round of interviews finding that the numbers agree about our candidate rankings (1st, 2nd, 3rd, down to the bottom) have we done our hiring task well that day? Has that "reliable" scale given us the best person to hire? The best interview assessments occur when there are disagreements between what one interviewer says and what another interviewer says, and this is followed by a

revealing conversation of why different interviewers have different impressions of a job applicant. This is the best way to expose the fatal flaws of candidates, as well as our own assumptions of what we really need for this position. Similarly, when two film critics disagree, I am more interested in the *why* behind the disagreement than a quantitative measure of the disagreement. When the underlying reasons become exposed, I can make a better decision about seeing this disputed movie.

Alternate form reliability is where there are different versions or formats for the test. For example, the Geriatric Depression Scale was developed with a face-to-face oral examination - the clinician asking the questions one-by-one. Research was subsequently done in which the GDS was administered through a telephone conversation with the patient, or the patient was alone in a room at a desk with paper and pencil, or on a computer. Although the correlations between different modalities of administration were consistently positive and usually high, we noted some discrepancies. Some patients would take longer on the phone (and really long on the computer, frequently asking for help entering on each item). Did this tell us something wrong about the scale or the needs of that specific patient?

Internal reliability is something we can assess for multi-item tests. The original GDS had thirty items, though shortened versions have employed fifteen or even five items in order to speed up the process of assessment with patients who may be physically weak. It turns out that the GDS has very high internal reliability - the same patients who look depressed on one item also look depressed on the other items. The test was actually constructed to be that way: unifactorial. Some other commonly used depression scales (e.g., Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale) have several distinct sub-factors. This should not be seen as a flaw in the scale, but an opportunity to determine what kind of symptoms are salient with a given patient.

Validity refers to whether or not the test actually measures the variable it claims to measure. In order to establish validity, we have to correlate the scores on the test to some "gold standard" quantitative measure of the variable. But, if we already have the gold standard, why are we developing another test? Clinically, this makes sense when the gold standard is time consuming or expensive (like a CT brain scan). We use a brief mental status test to screen patients quickly, and decide who needs a complete CT, PET, or MRI. This also makes sense in industrial psychology when the gold standard is some future outcome (i.e., how well the worker performs on the job after a year). A valid test strongly correlates with that future outcome and enables

us to make a hiring decision today with some degree of assurance that we have made a wise choice that will pay off in the future.

In consumer psychology, there is less of a need for such paper and pencil tests to do a psychographic assessment of potential customers. There are more relevant and easily measured demographic background factors to serve as predictors (e.g., geography, sex, age, income, ethnicity, religion). Even more useful are data about previous consumption patterns (tracking of mobile devices and searches). Someone who just purchased an airline ticket to Chicago is a good target for an ad about a Loop hotel.

While paper and pencil tests have some utility in the aforementioned branches of clinical, industrial, and consumer psychology, the branches of personality and social psychology are today littered with thousands of psychological tests employing dozens of items and numerous subscales, each professing its ability to measure (precisely, reliably, and validly) some unique variable. Some of these tests are very obscure, and no one but their authors seems to cite them (or even be aware of their existence). Consider the most widely cited studies in social psychology (i.e., Ashe, Milgram, Zimbardo, Festinger); they did not use paper and pencil tests to measure a variable, but directly observed a behavioral outcome.

Even some of today's most widely known tests may have questionable utility. Consider the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) which classifies individuals into one of sixteen types ("I'm an INTJ"). It has low to moderate correlations with all sorts of outcomes ranging from occupational satisfaction to marital compatibility. It could be called the Swiss Army Knife of psychological tests, a tool with dozens of uses. But, like the Swiss Army Knife, it is never the best tool for any specific use. If the MBTI correlates +.20 with job satisfaction as a plumber, there is probably some other test, developed on a longitudinal study of plumbers that correlates +.30.

In the 21st century, we won't need to rely so much on paper and pencil tests. Big data analytics will give us real time measurement updates on thousands of variables. At any point in time there could be some formula constructed by "machine learning" artificial intelligence to estimate future outcomes such as productivity on a certain task or satisfaction with a certain corporate culture.

It is our recommendation that big life decisions be data-informed, but never data-driven. Decisions must be values-driven and understood through evolving narratives.

Harv, then 34, was a software engineer for a large and established firm in Silicon Valley. He regarded himself as technically competent and highly motivated, but when he thought about his current position, he felt stuck, stagnated, alienated. He received a call from a recruiter and expressed enough interest to be called in for an interview. Harv's interviewer, trained in clinical psychology, included a brief symptom checklist along with a vocational assessment (leading to a Holland code profile).
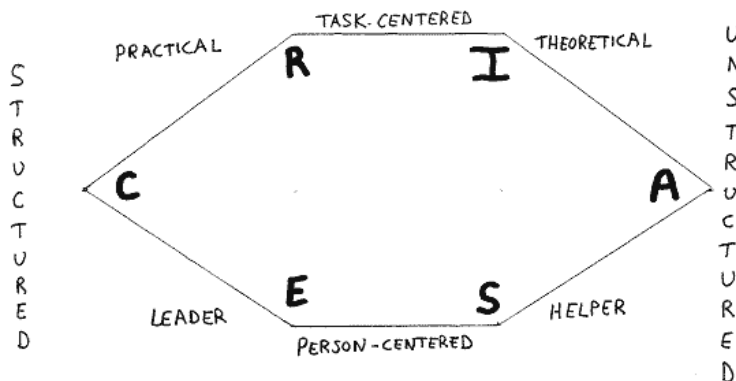
Harv was high on I, A, and R. His current job (and the corporate culture of the entire company) could be classified as C and R and I. Most engineering jobs are high R and high I, but if we compare Harv's profile with that of his company, we see an incompatibility leading to boredom - C and A are the most extreme opposites. Harv was not a fit for his current position, nor would he have fit much of anything with his current employer. He was not even a fit with the position that the recruiter was trying to fill at that time. An additional symptom checklist was an alert of some stress and depression. These test scores opened up a dialog about how Harv saw himself and his future. He outlined that narrative and began to explore how he might tweak it, or even reinvent himself.

Harv took a couple months off of work and got some psychotherapy that helped him explore some underlying assumptions about his life. During that time, he reconnected with an old friend from CalTech who was thinking of a startup company. Harv had the I and A traits to handle design and research, while his friend had the E and C to handle the finance and legal. Harv took the risk and four years later is happy he did. The next position fit his

narrative of being both competent and motivated. The testing did not achieve all that but helped set in motion the deeper exploration of personal narrative and ongoing decision making.

Chapter 6

Narrative across the Lifespan

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."
   Soren Kierkegaard

This Danish proverb was one of the favorite sayings of social psychologist Stanley Milgram. Our first reaction is to dismiss the quote as an obvious truism, like "a boat in the middle of the ocean is far from shore." When we reflect longer on the sentence, it appears to be an impossibility. How can we possibly do both? It sounds like a lament, a frustrated explanation of why we are doomed to suffer.

Perhaps we should look at Kierkegaard's following words:

"Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced."

On the surface, this is another truism, perhaps at best an encouragement to forge ahead with a willingness to accept some of the harsh treatment life has in store for us. What we are saying in this chapter is that people don't have to give up trying to solve the problems of life. Positive Psychology promises to help us experience life with fewer problems, more satisfaction, more achievement, and more fulfillment. But how can this be accomplished? *By creating narratives that facilitate flow and fulfillment.*

Your present life narrative is the product of (or at least influenced by) your past experiences (guided by the religious, parental, and therapeutic exposure that has been received). But your current narrative is also the basis by which you will interpret those past experiences as well as a guide to your future.

You must accept that living the lifespan is not something involving one decision in one moment, but an ongoing process: a journey rather than a stationary point in time. Your narrative gives you this perspective, a map for the journey.

Memory: Linking with the Past

Memory is how previous experiences are mentally retained. Memories are an essential component of identity. Are you the same person if you no longer have your memories to connect with your past? Will you be the same person in the future if, at that time, you can no longer remember who you are now? Having worked with hundreds of dementia patients in later life, I (TLB) would have to view the progressive loss of memory as the progressive loss of identity.

Narratives can preserve memories, but also distort them, and perhaps even transform them. Memories are not mechanically encoded like the grooves etched on a vinyl record, nor are they digitally encoded like an mp3 file. Every time a person recovers a memory from its long-term storage, it is somewhat recreated by whatever is going on at that point in that person's life - the contingencies of the urgent now. Because the narrative defines what is going on now, that narrative also transforms the memory. Narratives can even concoct false memories to match the current emotions or intentions.

Can people really remember things from their infancy? Probably not, but many people certainly think they can. So sure and curious are people about their early memories that we see, "'I remember being born' – 62 million hits on Google. 'I remember being a baby' – 154 million hits. 'I remember being in the womb' – 9 million hits," as people desperately attempt to research their own memories. Shaw (2016) lists two possible ways in which these could be distortions rather than true memories. Sometimes we experience source confusion, where we remember something, but not where we heard it from. In the case of early memories, we might have heard something about our infancy from a parent, and then imagine that it is coming from our own recollections. The other possibility is that the memory is just made up (because it fits the present narrative) and not because it relates to any real past events.

Alfred Adler warned that the further back we try to trace our memories, the greater this potential for distortion. Indeed, he viewed the earliest recollections of an individual ("What is the first thing you can remember?") as a mere projective technique for assessing an individual's current guiding fiction (i.e., narrative).

The role of narrative in preserving and distorting memory also occurs for our everyday experiences as adults. We do not remember a day as a simple catalog of events, details, and dialogue, but see it through the filter of our

emotions, personality, mood, memories of similar days we have encountered, and as a continuation of the ongoing narrative from the previous day. A narrative of one single day, therefore, is a subjective storytelling from a person to one's own self.

Daily narrative is an imperfect attempt to straddle the challenge of living life forward while understanding it backwards. The criterion by which that narrative is to be judged is how well it gives something meaningful to the narrator (and helps achieve utilitarian or ultimate relevance). Memories that are meaningful are likely to be remembered, even if they are not necessarily objectively correct. They have been viewed through the filter of narrative and seen from only the narrator's angle.

Each of us has some powerful individual memories of past experiences, whether joyous (the birth of a child) or traumatic (being the victim of violence). Some of these memories will become enshrined as symbols and rituals (e.g., anniversaries) while others we try to forget, perhaps with the help of therapy.

Freud, Adler, and Jung addressed the importance of memory in therapy. For the first two of these pioneers, it was the painful memories of early childhood that had to be addressed. For Jung, it was memories that supposedly go back to primal archetypes, and were somehow inherited from distant ancestors.

Freud considered these painful memories from the past and distinguished between suppression and repression. *Suppression* is accomplished at the conscious level by the ego and involves postponement of the id's desires. *Repression* takes place at the unconscious level and is when the superego brings about a forgetting of the id's demands. But the forgetting is not permanent. The memory or desire is not gone, just buried in the unconscious, and longing to escape. The repressed can return (for example in dreams). So, suppression rather than repression is the healthy goal of therapy.

Translating Freud into our language of narratives, we could say that suppression occurs when a healthy narrative has given us a new viewpoint on an old trauma. We still remember it, but now it is more like "So what"? It is not something to distract us from present tasks or future strivings. We will return to some of the other aspects of therapy in later chapters of this book.

Most of our memories are not traumatic, but hopefully useful (or at least benign). Consider the memories of what we have learned in school:

- 2 + 2 = 4
- In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue
- Names of the planets, in order from the sun
- How to spell MISSISSIPPI

We often use a mnemonic (memory aid) to help us remember some of these items; the Columbus rhyme or the Mississippi song, the vivid imagery of "My very educated mother just served us nachos," or the racier version: "Many virgins enter my jacuzzi, stripping until naked" (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune). There are many more examples of such mnemonics, the best of which involve visual or musical narratives to make them more effective. "Exposure to music not only alters but increases brain function in students" (Hayes, 2009). Perhaps the most famous example of this is in the movie *The Sound of Music*, as teacher Julie Andrews attempts to teach the children to remember the musical notes with the song, "Doe, a deer, a female deer…," and so on. Each character, animal, or object that is added to the song is a new part of the story with which the child can remember the next word needed, or in this case, the next musical note. It is a rare viewer of the movie who does not forever remember the order of musical notes from hearing this song. Some other popular childhood mnemonic devices are 'Roy G Biv' for the colors of the rainbow. Such mnemonic devices work well for high school students (Miller, 1967) and even medical students (Bruno et al. 2012), demonstrating how important the storytelling aspect is to our memories.

Of all the above things we learn in school, perhaps we are most likely to remember that 2 + 2 = 4, and not just because we see it and use it so often. We understand the rule, the logic behind the statement. Even if we forgot the rote statement, we could derive it again from that underlying concept. If I don't have it memorized that 10 times 24 is 240, I *just remember the rule*: multiplying by 10 just means adding a zero on the end. It is easier to remember the rule rather than all the data from a multiplication table. These concepts are like a catalog or index to the memory storage areas, allowing us to sort and select what memory we need at a given time.

According to Structuralist anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, the most important of all these concepts guiding memory are those that tie together language, the social structure, and religion. These connections guide us to notice and remember certain things, and revere symbols because they can be used in present rituals to re-enact myths (stories about the past). Such

memories help us comprehend and sustain complex social relationships (Mahr & Casibra, 2020).

Elizabeth Loftus has demonstrated that cognitive concepts help us remember by distorting the memory to fit the concepts used to remember it. In an experiment conducted more than forty years ago, participants were shown footage of cars involved in an accident. Immediately after the footage was shown, the participants were asked individually to describe the scene. The words used to speak to the participants were leading, with the intent of implanting false memories - guiding the witness to a particular narrative. Although all participants had seen the same silent movie of the accident, different participants received different verbal descriptions of the accident, about when the cars:

- Contacted each other
- Bumped each other
- Hit each other
- Smashed into each other
- Collided with each other

Loftus found that the leading words indeed affected the participants' memories, and therefore narrative, of the event. The participants tended to follow the words that had been used in the questions asked and acquire a narrative suitable to those words. Specifically, when the participants were called upon to give an estimated speed at which the accident occurred, the words implying greater force led to the subjects' estimate of a higher speed.

The narrative is how we interpret events. Shaw (2016) emphasized how subjective and prone to exaggeration our interpretations are. Narratives are not neutral, but are advocating for a specific agenda. Shaw gives one example of what she calls the *superiority illusion* - overestimating our favorable qualities and underestimating our unfavorable traits. She sees this as the driving factor behind many spousal conflicts, such as chore wars - we are more likely to remember what we have done and more likely to emphasize its importance.

The husband may have a narrative in which he is portrayed as contributing the lion's share to the marriage, even beyond income: cleaning, yardwork, repairs, even childcare. He has a vivid memory of his weekend

yard work, after all, he has the sensory experience of feeling the hot sun, the sweat, and the next day's sunburn and sore muscles to help him remember.

But the wife will have a narrative that underestimates his contribution and exaggerates her own. If his wife had been vacuuming the carpets while he read a book, he is likely to have been immersed in the story of his book and not have such memories of his wife's chore. He is now more likely to remember his yard work than her vacuuming and is at increased risk of believing he performs more chores than she does. The narrative here has created a *distorted* memory. Though containing some truths (memory of his chore), the narrative has been biased in his favor. It serves the function of bolstering his self-esteem, but if it makes him a less appreciative husband, it might be dysfunctional for the duration and quality of the marriage.

Below are some simple examples of how one event could take on different narratives, based on the subjective experiences of those taking part. It is easy to see how memories could become distorted based on the filter of each participant.

Event #1: A non-serious car accident takes place on a busy freeway. One driver was texting instead of paying attention and hit the car in front. Neither driver is happy about the situation, but the traffic was not traveling quickly, and no physical harm has been done to either driver. The accident had two witnesses.

Narrative A: Nicholas is a paramedic, and witnessed the accident while driving his own car. He has arrived on the scene of many accidents as part of his career, so he is familiar with both the serious and non-serious. He knows immediately that it is likely nobody was hurt. He parks and calmly walks to each of the drivers to ask if they are okay. To Nicholas, this is not that unusual of a circumstance. They will all soon drive away and Nicholas won't even mention this fairly insignificant part of his day to anybody. Nicholas's narrative is that this type of accident is a common occurrence and that these people are lucky that it was not worse. Through the filter of his career and relaxed approach, this accident will likely disappear from his memory at some point.

Narrative B: Emily was in a serious car accident a year ago. She suffered a broken arm, head trauma, and severe whiplash, which still gives her daily pain. After the accident, Emily developed PTSD, for which she

began to see a psychotherapist. She suffers panic attacks and flashbacks, and has high anxiety over driving. This anxiety prevented her from driving for several months after her accident. Her therapist has recently been encouraging her to try driving again, building up from simply driving around her neighborhood. This is her first time driving on the freeway since her accident. She is now a witness to this accident. When she sees the cars hit in her peripheral vision, time seems to slow down, her hands begin to shake, and she almost crashes her own car. She feels like she is at the scene of her own accident again; tears spring to her eyes, she feels the sting of adrenaline in her veins, and her head begins to throb. Emily can't even bring herself to leave her car. She doesn't want to see badly injured people in the cars. To Emily, this accident appeared to be major because of the trauma she had experienced and the strong emotions she had already been experiencing, having just attended therapy and now driving on the freeway for the first time since her accident. This accident doesn't become a *part* of the narrative of Emily's day, it becomes the entire narrative of her day. She will call her friends and family for support, and remember every detail of her experience two weeks later, when she next attends therapy. With the very sensory and personal experience Emily has had, this has embedded itself further into her memory than that of Nicholas, who experienced nothing out of his ordinary. She has witnessed this incident as more serious than it actually was because her pre-existing fear of accidents (her subjective filter) has given her a narrative that biased her experience. This will now give Emily a distorted memory of the event.

This situation is similar to what Loftus and Palmer (1974) looked at when they conducted their car crash memory study. We can see this study play out in the example of Nicholas and Emily. While they did not have psychologists implanting words into the experience of the accident, the two witnesses arrived at the scene with their own pre-existing 'words'. These 'words' were their pre-existing narratives about accidents. Nicholas's pre-existing narrative was one of non-panic and calm assessment. Emily's pre-existing narrative was one of extreme fear and bias based on personal trauma. We can say that each arrived with a narrative; one preserved the memory, and the other distorted it.

Event #2: In a busy city, there is an attempted kidnapping of a baby in a stroller. The would-be kidnapper tries to pick the baby up, but the baby is fastened to the stroller, and he is unable. The baby's nanny steps in, and a

police officer arrives on the scene to prevent the potential disastrous situation.

Narrative A: The baby in this situation is the well-known psychologist, Piaget. In his own words, "I can still see, most clearly, the following scene, which I believed until I was about fifteen. I was sitting in my pram, which my nurse was pushing in the Champs Elysees, when a man tried to kidnap me. I was held in by the strap fastened around me while my nurse bravely tried to stand between me and the thief. She received various scratches, and I can still vaguely see those on her face. Then a crowd gathered, a police officer with a short cloak and a white baton came up, and the man took to his heels. I can still see the whole scene and can even place it near the tube station." In this event, the narrative is that of a memory from infancy. This tells us that it is unlikely that any pre-existing trauma or social biases have colored the narrative. The story is also told with an apparent lack of emotion, suggesting a higher level of believability.

Narrative B: The nurse in this event later admitted that she had lied, and the event had not happened. Again, in Piaget's words, "When I was about fifteen, my parents received a letter from my former nurse saying that she had been converted to the Salvation Army. She wanted to confess her past faults, and in particular to return the watch she had been given on this occasion. She had made up the whole story, faking the scratches. I, therefore, must have heard, as a child, the account of this story, which my parents believed, and projected it into my memory." We have no account available to hear the words of the nurse, other than those narrated through Piaget. However, we know from his account of her confession that she lied. Whether her perception or memory was in some way distorted by mental illness or other cause will not be known. It is most likely that she chose to lie, for an unknown reason. Her story is unreliable, and we therefore cannot focus on the nurse's narrative other than the effect that it had on Piaget's memory.

Event #2 is another example of a classic experiment (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). Loftus was curious to see if she could implant false memories into the minds of her subjects. Participants were given untrue stories, by family members, about having been lost in a shopping mall as a child. Minor details were given on both occasions. After a period of a few weeks, the participants were asked about their experiences of being lost in the shopping mall. The participants appeared to have genuine memories of the event and had even

added details of their own. In some cases, participants were given descriptions of several childhood events, with being lost in a shopping mall being the only incorrect memory. Participants insisted that they had genuine memories of being lost in a shopping mall and were shocked to discover that these memories were untrue. This study suggests that memories can be implanted into the mind, and with little effort.

To look back now at Piaget's account of his 'kidnapping' memory, it is not dissimilar to those of the children being lost in the shopping mall. The memories are vivid with detail and those who claim the memories are certain of their having actually occurred. In the case of Piaget, the narrative was created by his nanny and essentially 'given' to him at an extremely young age. As Loftus and Pickrell have shown, creating false memories is not difficult, and Piaget seems to have grown up hearing the story (narrative) of his attempted kidnapping. As he grew through his childhood years, his imagination no doubt added to the story until the memory was full and ingrained. It remained his own narrative until the truth surfaced in his teens. We do not know what truly happened on the day that Piaget's nanny claimed the attempted kidnapping. What we do know is that she invented a narrative and likely preserved the true memory in her own mind while distorting that of Piaget. The most important question is whether this false memory served to distort Piaget's ongoing life narrative and reduce his self-confidence or exacerbate his fears?

Event #3: Two women are in a jewelry store, and see another woman steal several pieces of expensive jewelry. She runs out of the store quickly, before they are able to react, but they hurry to the counter to tell the sales assistant. After reviewing video footage, police have gathered a list of suspects, and the two witnesses are asked to come to the police station to identify the thief. The women pick out two different suspects and both are sure that they have picked the correct person.

Narrative A: Lisa tells the police that Suspect Two is the person who took the jewelry from the store. Her memory of the incident is vivid. She was talking to her friend, Amanda, saw movement in her peripheral vision, and turned to look. The suspect immediately turned away as she realized they were looking, but not before Lisa saw the long hair tied in a braid hanging over her shoulder, with bangs in the front. This is the feature that Lisa is most fixated on and there is only one suspect who has long hair with

bangs. Every other suspect has shorter hair. Lisa later discovered that her narrative, though convincing, is incorrect.

Narrative B: Amanda tells the police that Suspect Five is the person who took the jewelry from the store. Her memory of the incident is also vivid. She is at least as sure as her friend that she has picked the correct suspect, and she has a specific reason to feel this way. Before she left the house that morning, her husband asked her to pick up his new glasses from the optician's office. He wears round glasses. As Amanda was talking to her friend Lisa in the store and looked over at the suspect, she noticed that the woman was wearing round glasses, and before she realized the lady was stealing, she remembered the instructions to pick up her husband's glasses. Suspect Five is wearing round glasses. Every other suspect is wearing square glasses. Amanda also later discovered that her narrative, though convincing, is incorrect.

The above is a common occurrence in police cases. Daniel Schacter (2008) discussed *memory conjunction error,* a phenomenon in which people experience "erroneous conjunctions between features of different words, pictures, sentences, or even faces." He gives one example as, "Having met Mr. Wilson and Mr. Albert during your business meeting, you reply confidently the next day when an associate asks you the name of the company vice president: "Mr. Wilbert."" The brain is not forgetting but is mistakenly placing pieces of memories into the wrong order.

This often happens with facial recognition. In the case of Lisa and Amanda, they have remembered correct features, but in incorrect places. Their pre-existing narratives have affected their memories of the incidents. Lisa, who believes she saw a suspect with long hair and bangs, was talking with her friend before she turned to look at the suspect. Amanda has long hair and bangs. Lisa had been admiring Amanda's hair and thinking that she would like to grow her own hair long immediately before the incident. Amanda, who believes she saw a suspect with round glasses who had glanced at Lisa's pretty hoop earrings immediately before she turned to look at the suspect. They find out that the thief, Suspect One, actually has short hair with bangs and square glasses. The *memory conjunction error* caused the friends to confuse their immediately preceding thoughts with the thoughts that occurred during the robbery. Their pre-existing narratives, fleeting but important in this case – *I would like to grow my hair long* and *I need to get round glasses* - combined with another feature seen in the suspect

to create a mixture that didn't actually exist, just as Mr. Wilbert doesn't exist in Schacter's example.

This is why police lineups may be problematic. Elizabeth Loftus (1980) reflected, "Judges are often asked by attorneys to read a list of instructions to the jury on the dangers of eyewitness identification, but this method has not safeguarded the innocent, probably because judges tend to drone the instructions, and, as studies have shown, jurors either do not listen or do not understand them."

Stage Theories: Dead-End Narratives?

Because life is lived over time, and not at a stationary point in time, psychology must have some model for comprehending the dynamics of change over the lifespan. The criteria by which we should judge any developmental model would be that it should be able to:

- Understand the impact of an individual's *past*
- Provide guidelines for *present* interventions
- Predict likely *future* outcomes

Two of the most widely accepted theories of development (Piaget and Erikson) are stage theories.

Piaget's model is cognitive: focused on how individuals reason. This takes place in four age-related stages (perhaps better understood as four levels of reasoning ability, with each being dependent upon mastery of the previous stage).

age	stage	skill attained
birth - 2 years	sensorimotor	object permanence
2 - 7 years	preoperational	symbolic thought
7 - 11 years	concrete operations	conservation of quantity
11 - adulthood	formal operations	hypothetical-deductive reasoning

This model has been used for decades to explain to educators why you cannot teach arithmetic to an infant or have a first grader do calculus equations or physics experiments. (Of course, those teachers who actually attempt to teach these things run the risk of finding Piaget irrelevant, so they

have to turn to Montessori or Vygotsky for theoretical guidance in explaining their successes).

Piaget has influenced other developmental models, such as Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which can tell us how someone comes to a moral judgment (but not always which verdict they come to).

Erikson's model is psychoanalytic, rooted in Freudian theory and his own practice in child analysis. The model is focused on the interaction of internal drives, emotions, interpersonal relations, and social constraints. Erikson's eight stages are actually a product of tacking on three adult stages to Freud's five stages of early psychosexual development (oral, anal, phallic, latency, genital) though Erikson does tone down the sexual and emphasize the interpersonal and social. Each age is characterized by a conflict, with a successful outcome yielding a more functional psychosocial level (a "virtue").

age	conflict	virtue
Birth - 1 year	Trust vs mistrust	hope
1 - 3 years	Autonomy vs shame & doubt	will
3 - 6 years	Initiative vs. guilt	purpose
6 - 12 years	Industry vs. inferiority	competence
adolescence	Identity vs. diffusion	fidelity
early adulthood	Intimacy vs. isolation	love
mid adulthood	Generativity vs. stagnation	care
old age	Integrity vs. despair	wisdom

Erikson's stairs
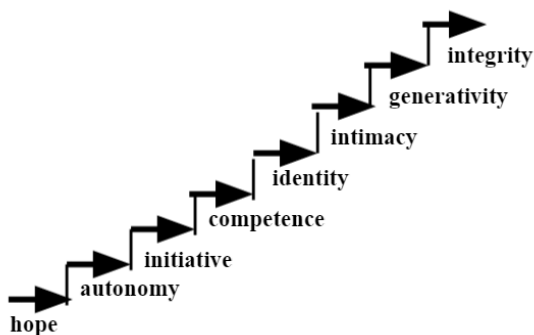
As with Piaget, this model has been of great use to those who work with children who want to be able to put a label on (and/or find a reason for) developmental failure.

Johnny is withdrawn. He failed stage#1 because he did not get enough cuddling, so he has no hope.

Susie has OCD. She must have failed stage#2 and developed unhealthy compulsions instead of a healthy will. She must have been toilet trained too severely (or maybe her mother was too lenient on this matter).

Billy is over-inhibited. He failed stage#3 and must have a boatload of guilt, probably stemming from Oedipus.

Sally doesn't care about her college studies. She must have developed this inertia back in the latency stage and never became competent academically.

Jimmy still doesn't know what he wants to be, after backpacking through Europe for three years. He must have failed stage#4. He's never going to find himself.

Jenny has been thirty-something for five years. She has no problems getting male attention, but just never seems to develop a committed relationship. Time ran out on stage#6, but maybe her problems stem from stage#5, or maybe stage#3. Maybe that Electra Complex never resolved.

Harry has the same job he has had since he came back from Iraq. He never finished college or started his own business. He kept his marriage together (or maybe his wife should get credit for that). His kids wonder if he has a life beyond the couch and remote control. His stagnation now must be due to a failure in stage …. ?

Iris is 82, widowed four years ago, and deeply depressed. Her psychiatrist thinks it's because of unresolved grief and excessive arthritic pain, but Eriksonians know it is because she never developed the virtue of … back in stage# … .

When I trot through the Erikson eight, my students are quick to point out:

- How North American!
- How middle class!
- How male-oriented!
- How heteronormative!
- How mid 20th century!

- How irrelevant to a clinical intervention!

It is not usually the 18-year-old students saying this, but the ones who have been married (and divorced) and who have had kids, and several jobs, and have worked with irate customers and disoriented patients and flakey ex-spouses and demanding bosses in the real world. These students have seen too many examples of real people whose lives just don't fit those neat eight steps (but who turned out OK). More importantly, my students have seen cases of adult lives that got messed up (but not due to what happened back in stage#2).

Despite the obvious differences between Piaget and Erikson, both make some key underlying assumptions about human mental development:

- There are fixed, identifiable stages.
- These follow an invariant sequence.
- Successful resolution of a given stage involves the acquisition of a specific virtue or ability.
- Success in subsequent stages depends upon success in the prior stages.
- There are optimal ages (critical periods) for mastery, and if the virtue is not attained then, it becomes exceedingly difficult to remediate at a later stage.

The Piagetian and Eriksonian generalizations may apply in many cases, perhaps even with most children. However, when we get to adulthood, there are so many exceptions, that these theories have little if any value.

Having interviewed, examined, or treated thousands of elders in hospitals, nursing homes, and senior centers, I (TLB) fail to see much applicability of either of these popular stage theories. The dynamics of late life depression do not fit Erikson's model, "Woe is me, I failed stage#3." Elders get depressed because they cannot cope with the dog dying, the kids moving away, missing their friends at work, and their own deteriorating bodies. The elders who are more resilient now may have displayed such resilience in early stages, but it is unclear if what happened to them before is the best explanation for current resilience. And then there are so many cases where individuals suffered horrifically in a prior stage, and yet turned out alright in later stages.

Having worked with dozens of Holocaust survivors, I have been most impressed by the differences in their narratives (Brink, 1994). Some were in their fifties when they were in the camps, others mere children, but most of the ones that survived to talk to me were in their teens or early twenties. When I saw them, they could have been in their fifties or their nineties. I could not sort them into any Eriksonian pattern, e.g., if you were in your teens during Dachau, you would have marital problems in Chicago in your sixties.

What was apparent to me was the extreme diversity of the lives of these survivors. Of course, they were different individuals, from different social circumstances, even before the Nazis disrupted their lives, and they had different Holocaust experiences: Were they sent to a camp? How did they hide? How did they get to the U.S., Israel, or Argentina?

But the biggest difference was the coping strategy, the narrative sustaining the resilience I saw in Holocaust survivors' later lives. Some completely repressed their experience, never talked about it, and tried not to think about it. Others almost compulsively had to tell their story to anyone who would listen (over and over). I could not discern a pattern of one approach being healthier than another. The crafted narrative of each individual was unique, and typically, the more unique it was the more resilience it sustained. Perhaps my "sample" was biased in the sense that those with victim narratives just succumbed and died in the camps. Just because you are really a victim does not mean that you have to define yourself as only a victim or even primarily a victim.

Gloria was born in the late 1940s in rural Mexico. Her earliest memory is being set on a horse by her uncle, hearing her brothers cheer, and feeling so accomplished and proud (of herself and her family). She must have been about four years old then, and to this day she fondly recalls her uncle, horses, and life on the ranch. When she was about ten, she saw bandits kill her father, steal the harvest of sesame seeds, and set fire to the ranch house. Although she is now in her seventies, she still suffers from PTSD because of this event. With her mother and siblings, she had to walk fifty miles to get to their uncle's farm. Her formal schooling was disrupted, as she had to assume more responsibilities as the oldest daughter. At age fourteen, another local bandit proposed marriage. She was repulsed by the idea, but her mother said, "If you reject him, there will be problems with our families." So, to avoid this unwanted suitor, Gloria ran away to the next state, where she worked in a restaurant, making menudo all day. Eventually, she made it to Mexico

City, where she entered a convent. After deciding not to become a nun, she became a domestic servant for the Basque family that owned the Bimbo bakery. To help her younger brother go to medical school, she went to the U.S., where she worked as a house cleaner, cook, and driver, continuing to learn English, acquiring new job skills, and finding wealthier employers. Eventually, she married an up-and-coming Silicon Valley consultant, and now she has three homes in the U.S., several in Mexico, and servants of her own.

What about those cognitive skills Piaget said she could not master? She learned how to read Spanish in night school in Mexico in her twenties. She then learned how to speak English and how to read it in night school in the U.S. in her thirties. She never learned to use a computer, but she never saw a real need to.

What about those Eriksonian "virtues"? She clearly had a disruption of stage#4 (industry vs. inferiority during the elementary school years), but she certainly gained "competence" of the most important academic skill (reading) later on. Erikson's idea of the adolescent stage#5 that it is a moratorium on adult roles: that didn't happen here because Gloria was thrust into those responsibilities at age ten. However, that did not preclude her from developing an identity: *I am the one that the family counts on* (what Adler would call *social interest*). So, she had to start being generative at age ten instead of thirty. The intimacy stage of the early twenties was delayed until after she had two decades of work. So, even though in this case we have a profound ACE (adverse childhood experience) followed by disrupted stages, skipped stages, out of sequence stages, and yet: success. Maybe resilient narratives matter more than rigid stages.

If we view stage theories as deterministic explanations for failure, they are dead-end narratives: "Sorry, your life got screwed up back in a previous stage, and nothing can fix it now. Get used to being a victim."

Nicola was abandoned by her father when she was five years old. Her father, shortly after leaving the family, had children with his new wife, and stopped seeing Nicola and her siblings. She had previously been a friendly and happy child, but at this point, knowing that her father was spending time with other children and not her, she developed the dead-end narrative, "I have been abandoned because I'm not good enough."

Both Freud and Erikson would anticipate a lifelong pattern of dysfunctional behavior arising from this event. Freud, in theorizing that the personality is solidified by the age of five, would state that this sudden loss

of stability and figure of authority would, at this pivotal age, bring Nicola to expect to be abandoned in the future. Nicola won't have a successful resolution of that Electra Complex. Erikson's theory states that this stage involves the child working to initiate life change and having feelings of guilt if this is not achieved. In reality, Nicola retreated and became very shy, not wanting to talk to or be around many people. She needed to be coaxed to act by her mother and teacher. Erikson would therefore state that Nicola has failed to achieve Initiative and will be affected by the lifelong feeling of Guilt.

Now, as a young woman, Nicola does in fact experience a lack of trust and feelings of guilt. The actions of her father many years ago still affect her now, and Freud and Erikson would be proven correct in the theory that Nicola developed a schema from the event of abandonment. As an adult, Nicola still has that same dead-end narrative she came up with as a child: "I am not good enough. People will always leave me because there will be somebody better than me for them to be with."

Nicola has a difficult time with dating because this narrative affects every relationship she has. The narrative, or schema, tells her that she will be abandoned. This narrative has led to the development of certain personality traits, like aggression and people-pleasing. In expecting the abandonment, Nicola acts angrily, pushing the other person away; in seeing some distance arise from this action, she then becomes scared and works to please them in order to be accepted again. This schema shows itself not only in romantic relationships, but also familial and platonic. In other words, she has many unhealthy personality traits, and she does not have any healthy relationships.

How Nicola's future looks depends on how reflective she will be, and how much willpower she can develop. This narrative may remain, in which case, Nicola will be unlikely to ever develop a healthy relationship. If she realizes that it is affecting her life to this extent, she may decide to see a therapist or read some self-help books in order to learn about how the event of abandonment created and shaped her narrative and has directed her life since.

So, give Freud and Erikson a grade of "A" for explaining dysfunctional outcomes by looking into the past influences of events. But could Freud and Erikson have succeeded had the outcome been different? If Nicola had developed a more resilient narrative and became a more flourishing adult? What Freud and Erikson missed is that it was not just the event of being abandoned that doomed Nicola, it was the narrative she developed. Had

some other adult helped her to develop a more resilient narrative, the outcome would have been different.

Perhaps the best way to find some utility in Erikson's theory is to modify it according to some of the 21st century insights of Positive Psychology, specifically the concepts of *mindset* (Dweck, 2017) and *grit* (Duckworth, 2019). We could view Erikson's adolescent moratorium on adult development as a proposed safe space for the development of an adult narrative (McAdams, Josselson, Lieblich, 2006). But this is not something that will come about naturally without effort (akin to the changes of the adolescent physique). You have to grow your grit by having "a passion to accomplish a particular top-level goal and the perseverance to follow through" (Duckworth, 2019). We see grit as equivalent to willpower, and it would serve Erikson's function of getting the adolescent out of the morass of "identity diffusion" and toward the formulation of a distinct adult identity.

Dweck's (2017) concept of *mindset* is the part of your narrative that understands how we are developing new skills. A *fixed* mindset rejects that possibility: "I cannot learn algebra because I was not born with the math gene." A *growth* mindset is a narrative of possible change: "I have not yet learned algebra" (which implies that with enough grit, algebra is something that might be mastered in the future).

A case study can be presented here to follow a person through adolescence and into adulthood, looking at how the growth mindset and grit can work together to form a narrative for one possible outcome.

Lauren could be assessed to have a *growth mindset*. Though she describes life as a teenager as "tough," she appears to be determined to live an achievement-filled life, listing cheerleading, gymnastics, and preparation for college as a few of her many pastimes. In fact, she states, "You name it, I've done it." She seems like a girl with a bright future. But is she spread too thin? Doomed to get stuck in identity diffusion?

It is not clear, at this point, whether or not Lauren has sufficient grit to channel her growth mindset into real achievements. Her narrative, at this point, is that she aspires to be a "regular" person and live an active life. This is a narrative typical for teenagers, so by the theory of Erikson, her life growth and therefore narrative appear to be happening on schedule (at least for middle class, heteronormative, NorthAmerican children).

However, Lauren soon meets a substantial life challenge. At the age of sixteen, she begins to experience health problems. "Things that I've never had trouble doing are becoming painful. After sewing, my hands become

rigid and swollen. After a day at Disneyland, I can barely walk because my hips and knees hurt so bad." After many doctor appointments, Lauren is diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic polyarticular arthritis. Having previously in this case study established the presence of a growth mindset, this challenge should tell us whether or not Lauren will take the path of bringing grit into her life. Again, Duckworth has stated that a person not having previously shown grit can develop the trait under pressure. Let us look at her initial reaction to the diagnosis: "Wait! What? No no no! This news left my head spinning." It is an understandable response, as Lauren is being significantly physically affected. This interrupts the desirable narrative of 'active teen'. How she proceeds from this point will let us know if she is developing grit or not.

A major premise of Positive Psychology is that those who have a narrative of agency (that they are in control of their lives) have higher life satisfaction and more resilience in coping with disease, accidents, and other crises (Bandura, 1997, 2006, 2016; Schwartz, 2016). After Lauren's disappointment at hearing the news, she quickly begins to research the condition.

Grit indeed begins to appear in the story. The first sign is Lauren's description of her illness as "my new best friend." As she discovers that there is no cure for the condition, Lauren decides to embrace her new reality and see it as a companion who she now has to care for. "I figured we'd be together for a while. Why not call her my best friend?" Many adults would have a difficult time accepting a lifelong illness with such grace; for a previously very active teen, this grit is showing strongly and quickly. Lauren discovers the Arthritis Foundation, and with it, Family Juvenile Arthritis Days, conferences, and camps for teens with her condition. She is thrilled to discover that she is not alone in her journey, and decides to attend a family day with her mother. Though nervous – "Although I had my mom, I walked into that first JA day feeling alone" – it doesn't remain that way for long. "I met two of my closest friends. From that moment, I never felt alone." This is where we see Lauren's life narrative make a sudden change. From despair and fear of a desolate and difficult future, we see optimism emerge. Lauren is choosing for her life narrative to be one of growth. The growth mindset has led to a narrative also of growth.

Lauren is now eighteen years old. She has lived with the condition for two years, and we can expect to have reliable indicators of grit if it has been developed. Today, Lauren is working at her first job, having been home

schooled by her mother and recently graduating high school on time. She is working at a camp for children and teens who have disabilities which often prevent them from taking part in activities typical for others their age. The disabilities range from mild to severe. Although Lauren still has to deal with the daily reality of her own illness, she feels she is contributing to the world in a constructive way and feels good about herself and her life. "I can stand up every day and fight. Because I know they are fighting the exact same battle. Do things get rough sometimes? Of course. Do I fear what the future holds for someone with my disability? Indeed. But I know that I am not alone. There are 300,000 of us fighting a battle to find a cure." In this statement we see purpose and determination. Lauren defines grit. "Grit specifies having a passion to accomplish a particular top-level goal and the perseverance to follow through" (Duckworth, 2019).

Chapter 7

Overlapping Roles: Template for Adult Life

Throughout life you have many roles. You are an actor in need of a script. Your narrative provides that script, or at least its content. But you are not a puppet. You are also the playwright and the director.

For most people, certain roles may be more salient during certain age ranges, but there are many exceptions. Biological development and social institutions (e.g., public education) tend to match certain childhood roles to certain ages. Some social psychologists (e.g., Bernice Neugarten) have suggested that going through certain experiences or entering certain roles too early (or too late) according to the norms of our culture creates stress for an individual.

As we enter adulthood, our role patterns diverge from those of other individuals, reflecting the unique pattern of choices we have made. Childhood was more about how our roles shaped our choices. Adulthood is more about how we choose certain roles and shape them to match our ongoing development. We can best accomplish this by crafting a healthy narrative.

Child: The Initial and Most Enduring Role

The first role in our lives is that of a child of parents. If we are orphaned early in life, it certainly can be a challenge to mastering the cognitive skills of Piaget or the interpersonal skills of Erikson. The importance of this role as child of parents diminishes as we enter adulthood, but depending upon the individual's life course, it may re-emerge (perhaps under redefined terms).

Sarah, age 28, married her high school sweetheart, had three children, and watched her life disintegrate as her husband became addicted to meth. This boomerang daughter returned to her parents' home and relies upon her father to provide a role model for her sons, and her mother to provide childcare while she goes back to school to study nursing. Sarah's challenges do not go back to initiative in stage#3, or a lack of identity in stage#5 or even

a lack of intimacy in stage#6. She truly loved her husband and if he had not fallen into meth, the marriage might have worked. Her return to the old family home is not primarily to seek shelter from an emotional storm or repair some childhood flaw in her character, but to build a new adult pathway into career and parenthood. Her non-victim narrative is facilitating this: "I negotiate responsibilities and tasks with my parents so that the boys' needs are met and none of the three adults in this household feels exploited."

As a branch manager for a bank, Janet, now 53, has a different frustration within her role as a child of parents. Since her mother passed away two years ago, Janet has had the responsibility of taking care of her 84-year-old father. She has to make decisions about medical care, finances, and where he is going to live. Most recently, she had to take away his car because his driving became so impaired. She cannot rely upon Piaget to show her some binomial factoring she missed in algebra class her sophomore year of high school, or Freud to help her re-experience an Electra Complex. She needs an adult narrative and some good advice about the law, social services, and health care.

Janet finally decides to get power of attorney regarding her father. He agrees to move into her home, where she sets the rules about mealtimes and when the laundry gets done. He is lucid and alert enough to know that this is the best deal he is going to get, and that if this arrangement fails, the next stop is a nursing home.

A man is not ennobled by what he gets, but by what he gives: time, compassion, and service to others (e.g., family, career, and friends). This was Adler's understanding of *social interest*. If we look at the lives of Gloria, Sarah, and Janet, what we see is the child-of-parents role morphing. For Gloria it was at age 10, for Sarah in her late 20s, and for Janet after 50. For all three, it appears to have been a healthy transition, driven by a narrative of "I'm no longer the helpless child, I can work with my family to assume responsibilities." Responsibility in the sense of being responsible for others must be built on the foundation of being responsible for one's own actions.

> "Responsibility is what gives life meaning."
> -Jordan Peterson

For most of us, by age five or six we have been thrust into an additional role, that of student, and this may become the dominant role in our lives for the next 12 or 16 years. For Gloria, that role ended abruptly at 10, and at 18

for Sarah. For both of these women, they could go back in their twenties. For Janet it was straight through 16 years for a BA, then two years of solid work, then back for an MBA part time. Especially with the U.S. system of community colleges, branch campuses and online education, one's formal education does not have to be limited to the teens. This is a role that can be started or stopped many times. It can be the dominating role in one's life (as it is for the 19-year-old at a residential college living in a dormitory, taking a full course load, and trying to make the track team) or just one other part of a complex life (as it was for Gloria, Sarah, and Janet when they returned to school in their late twenties).

Notice how these roles do not completely stop before another role is commenced. The three women did not cease becoming the child-of- parents when they started school. Gloria and Janet were also working when they returned to school. Sarah did not cease being a mother when she returned to school. These roles overlapped - Sarah was, at the same time, a daughter of the parents with whom she lived, the mother of her three boys, and a returning college student. This is the great challenge of adult life: making decisions involving multiple roles providing both multiple options and multiple criteria.

When Roles Become Dysfunctional

If role theory is the best template for understanding the course of the lifespan, it must be able to understand how some lives get off the healthy track. There are at least half a dozen ways.

Role Conflict

Juggling more than one role at a time opens up the risk that one requires us to zig while the other role needs us to zag. Fortunately for Sarah, trying to function within the roles of daughter, mother, and student, she was able to work out a synergistic relationship between the roles. Many people cannot achieve this. Work requires them to be in one place, while family responsibilities require them to be somewhere else at the same time - a different building on one side of town, or a different state (or even a different

state of mind). Sometimes, you just can't "have it all" and must choose between these conflicting roles.

Role Incompatibility

Sometimes the problem with roles is not that they conflict with each other, but that they conflict with something internal, who we are at our very core. From very early on in life, most of us confront some of the demands of life and painfully conclude: "I just wasn't cut out to be a. …"

Colleen was born in 1934, part of the age cohort known as the "Silent Generation." Her Catholic parents were not that devout, but they were relatively obedient to the mandates of the Church, enough to motivate her steelworker father to send Colleen and her three younger brothers to a parochial school. After Pearl Harbor, her father's hours at the steel mill increased, and he was rarely home other than to sleep for the next shift. A year later, her mother found work in a slaughterhouse. Meanwhile, Colleen's responsibility for her three brothers had increased greatly. The cooking and cleaning took a lot of time, but disciplining these unruly males was exasperating. Colleen just could not see herself in this role of raising children. When the war ended, and mother lost her job to a returning veteran, she became depressed in resuming some of the household chores that Colleen had taken over.

But at school, Colleen was exposed to another role for young women in the mid-twentieth century. She was taught by nuns, who did not have to obey their husbands, or fear their jobs being forfeited to some man. Most of the girls in Colleen's high school were married within three years of graduation, but she decided to enter the convent and earn a college degree. Her religious order offered two career paths - teaching and nursing. She chose the latter to get further away from the role of having to deal with fussy kids.

Colleen had a healthy adult lifespan because she recognized a potential role incompatibility and decided to avoid it. Of course, if she had not been that religious, or obedient to the authority of the Mother Superior, then Colleen would have had role incompatibility with being a nun as well.

Role Overload

Even if you manage to attain roles that match your aspirations and are consistent with your aptitudes, life can get difficult if you find yourself experiencing too much demand from too many different roles simultaneously. Even if the roles are not in conflict or incompatible with your aptitudes and interests, under ideal conditions, if there are just too many things being demanded from too many commitments at the same time, this is just too much. This overstimulation is what is commonly referred to as stress, though technically, stress is the individual's internal response to the external demands (known more precisely as stressors).

Jack is in his late twenties. He has always been a good student, hard worker, loyal friend, and trusted companion. He married his college sweetheart after graduation. He easily got a job with his business degree, but she had to do a couple more years of postgraduate study for her teaching and school counseling credentials. For the first few years, things were rough, but they had few distractions in their studio apartment, and maintained a close and mutually fulfilling relationship. Then his wife got her job and Jack could start taking night classes for his M.B.A., which was going to take him three years part-time. A year into the program, his wife got pregnant. She was able to stay home with the baby for six months, but then had to return to work as Jack started another semester. Let's add up Jack's mounting roles:

- Worker in the office
- Husband to a busy wife and mother
- Student in a competitive M.B.A. program
- New father assuming more childcare responsibility

When he got married, he easily handled the primary role of work; then school (a little stress), his wife's new work-related stressors (a little more stress), the role of active fatherhood (a big stressor), and his wife going back to work (an intolerable level). Jack does not dislike any of these roles and considers them to be key features of his life course. He has the composure and people skills to handle any two (maybe three) of these, but all four is an overload, even for the level-headed, good-hearted Jack.

Role Underload

Let's follow Jack for the next thirty years. He continues to have a great marriage (he did get the right wife), welcomes a daughter a couple of years later, and has a successful career in investment brokerage. When he is in his early fifties, the kids go off to college and start careers and families in other metropolitan areas. Five years later his wife succumbs to ovarian cancer. In 2008, his investment firm is one that does not get bailed out in time; as a 62-year-old investment advisor, he watches as his own portfolio of stocks and rental housing is eaten away by the Great Recession. While all of these events are stressful, Jack's real problem is a deficiency of roles. He no longer has a job or a wife to focus on. His father role has been greatly reduced. Many men are prepared for these types of role reductions at age 72, but not Jack at age 62.

Rapid Role Transition

Now, let's continue to follow Jack: suppose things start going the right way for him. Jack finds another good woman, falls in love, and marries her. She is twenty-five years younger than Jack and was recently widowed when her husband died in a farming accident. Jack now moves to Idaho where he is going to manage the potato farm and serve as stepdad to a fifteen-year-old boy with autism.

Let's assume the best-case scenario here. There is no role incompatibility - Jack can manage the business and he has the patience and people skills to be a parent again, even to a son with special needs. Let's also assume that this entire new package is not creating another role overload, that Jack can handle this combination of roles, as well as the responsibility of each role individually.

The problem that could still occur is due to the rapid pace of the change from his pre-recession life back in 2007. Look at the changes

- Geography: California to Idaho
- Spouse: widower to remarried
- Parent: empty-nester to stepdad
- Career: investment broker to potato grower

So many changes, so little time to adjust.

Role Timing

Even if role changes don't come all at once, there is an additional time factor. Suppose they come at an unanticipated point in life. Bernice Neugarten suggested that every society has an understanding of a "social clock" in which certain life events would happen around certain ages. She noted that middle class individuals might see higher ages for most life events.

When should a boy get a man's job? A steelworker might say 18 (when the boy is done with high school) while middle class men might say 23 (when his son has finished college, and maybe a professional degree).

When should a woman get married? The steelworker might think 20, while the middle-class father might suggest 25 (giving her a chance to finish college and try the world of work).

When is a man an old man? The steelworker might think 65 (because he should be retired by then) while physicians and attorneys are more capable of continuing a career.

When I (TLB) did research in rural Mexico and asked these same three questions, I observed an even more compressed perception of the life cycle. A boy should be doing a man's work at 16. A girl should be married by 18. A man is old at 50 (too old to plow with a mule).

Even though these numbers are subjective, depending upon the culture and social class, Neugarten emphasized the difficulty of having major life events occur too early or too late. Becoming a mother in your twenties is better than becoming a mother in your early teens (or late forties).

Becoming a parent in his late twenties was stressful for Jack (due to role overload), but suppose it had occurred ten years earlier? That would be a real problem in role timing that might have upset his life plan. He might have had to settle for working as a bank teller and may not have ended up very high in the bank's hierarchy. Becoming a stepdad at 62 was hard enough for Jack, but suppose it had happened ten years later when he had less physical energy and patience? We expect to lose our spouse sometime when we are old but suppose Jack had lost his wife when his kids were little: more stress.

Careers: Finding Flow & Utilitarian Relevance

Let's look deeper into the role that an individual has as one who maps out and follows a career pathway. Janet and Jack had the advantage of entering the job market with a B.S. in finance from Cal State, and a few years later, re-entering that job market with an M.B.A. plus a few years of experience in banking. On the other hand, Gloria was thrust into the job market as an illiterate 14-year-old, with her family two hundred miles away in the next state. But regardless of how difficult our circumstances might be, we all have to make some serious decisions with long-lasting consequences when it comes to our careers.

In previous cohorts (and more rigid societies) there was more chance for role incompatibility in careers. Individuals had to match their personality traits and interests with assigned occupations rather than pursuing a journey guided by one's talents and passions. Gloria had few real options, given her social situation. She was expected to be a farmer's wife, that was the limited range of local opportunities. In a large Mexican city, a girl could be a restaurant worker, a domestic servant, a factory worker, or a nun (or a prostitute). Gloria's personality and interpersonal skills would have made for a physician (obstetrics would have been her favorite) or a lawyer for peasants' rights. Those opportunities were not on her table at that time, but she still had to make some decisions about her career. One of those decisions was to find a better table of opportunities by moving to the U.S.

Wise decision making when it comes to careers or any reconciliation of multiple roles requires the conjunctive approach outlined by Herbert Simon. Here you begin by listing your criteria. These are determined by your values, preferences, priorities, and obligations. These are the goals, the ends for which you strive. Sarah may have had these three criteria in mind:

- Take care of the kids (this would be the foremost priority, the one that cannot be sacrificed)
- Save money (since she cannot expect alimony or child support from the drug-addicted ex)
- Get started on a new career by going back to college

The next thing we do is we list the options, the alternative course of actions available at this time. These are the possible means for pursuing the

desired ends. In Sarah's case, she had narrowed it down to these three possibilities:

- Stay in the city where she was, get a low-paying job and work long hours (leaving her kids unsupervised)
- Stay in the city where she was, go to college, get welfare, move into a public housing project (exposing her boys to gangs)
- Move in with her parents and start college

After talking with her parents, she was convinced that the last option was the best for meeting all three of her criteria. If her criteria had been different, the choice might have been different. If her "freedom" to pursue new relationships with men had been a priority, she might have selected one of the other options.

Simon called this approach to decision making *satisficing* because we don't always get to choose the option that is clearly the best on all criteria (or even the best on any one criterion). Rather than maximizing gain, this approach seeks to minimize loss or risk. Conjunctive decision making *satisfices* in that it seeks a satisfactory solution on all criteria rather than an optimal solution for any one criterion.
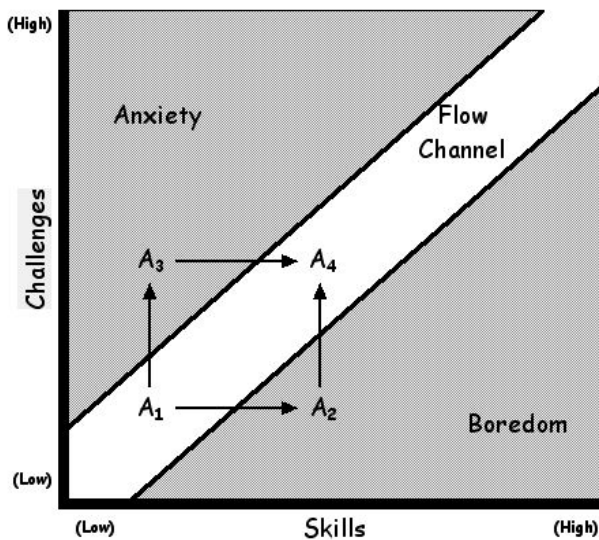
From Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience
by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (page 74)

In making career decisions, several factors emerge when it comes to forming our criteria. Most workers put a high priority on compensation (whether in the form of salary, wages, commissions, bonuses, profit sharing, or stock options). Another factor is usually benefits (and that is especially true in the U.S. for medical coverage of oneself and dependents). Other factors might be ease of commute, employment stability, prestige, match with one's talents, time off, work schedule, and the sense that one's work makes a difference in the lives of others. Depending upon the relative importance of each of these, the conjunctive calculations will be different for individuals, or even for the same individual at different points in life.

One of the founders of Positive Psychology, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, has identified another important factor in career-related criteria: the facilitation of the experience of flow.

Flow is a person's complete absorption and engagement in the task at hand. Think of someone playing a video game or dancing to a favorite song. This is most likely to happen when the challenge of the task is great, but not beyond the skills of the individual to master it. When the task is overwhelming, flow is precluded by anxiety, When the task is inadequate to the skillset, boredom may arise. While this is often found in hobbies and other recreational activities, the greatest stage for flow is found in our careers. That is why it is so important to have one of the major criteria in career selection be the intrinsic interest in the job's fundamental activities and a match between requisite job tasks and individual aptitudes.

Forging the best career path for an individual involves the conjunctive decision-making process of outlining the relevant criteria. Each individual must decide, at that point in life, given the competing roles and self-assessment of aptitudes and interests, which criteria are most salient:

- Present compensation level
- Eventual potential compensation level
- Matching interests
- Matching aptitudes
- Willingness to complete the education/training

If any one of these is lacking, it may not be a viable career path for that individual.

In addition to these criteria for selecting a career path, the individual must also use a conjunctive approach for selecting a specific job offer. Compensation and benefit packages will vary by employer, as will the quality of the supervision, the morale of the coworkers, and the length of the commute. Most people don't require that an employer get a perfect score on all of these criteria, but each worker has in mind a certain minimum, below which a given employer is off the list: "I just could not put up with that …. "

- Psycho boss
- Toxic co-workers
- Two-hour commute

Notice how at different points in life, the criteria (or the weights you assign to those criteria) might change. Before I was thirty, I was willing to take a longer commute, lower pay, and longer hours. I would do almost anything to build the skills and make the contacts I would need for my future career path. If something would look good on my CV, I would do it.

What changed after age thirty? It wasn't just moving into Erikson's stage#7. I now had a wife, a mortgage, and a child to support (both financially and emotionally). These roles changed my narrative and my priorities.

Free will is about making choices between the alternatives presented by external reality. Usually, the available options are short of optimal. Not all of our priorities are going to be met. Satisficing means that we choose to have some of our priorities met before others (or instead of others). At certain points in our lives, achieving flow on the job may not be as important as bringing in enough to pay the rent.

Erin is a photographer and is running a failing business. She has been in business for four years and will have to decide soon if she wants to continue. She has been losing money for a year. She never says no to work; she photographs whatever comes her way – weddings, families, pets, and headshots – in an attempt to make as much money as possible. She even runs regular promotions to give away photo shoots free or at deeply discounted rates, in order to draw customers in. Nevertheless, she finds herself with few customers and very little money coming in. The people who do come to her seem to want to get pictures for as little money as possible, and it frustrates Erin that her talent is not being recognized. She decides to take a break and look at what she may be doing wrong.

Erin looks over her advertising and soon realizes why she does not attract many customers. In taking a step back, she sees that as a photographer, she has a clear narrative: *I am not worth much*. Through giving away and discounting photo shoots, as well as charging very little otherwise, potential customers are being given the message that she is not worth much. They then choose to go to more expensive photographers because they trust that they will do a good job.

Erin realizes that she must overhaul her business model and pricing structure. In taking on every type of photo shoot, she has not focused on or specialized in any particular area. This means that if somebody is looking for a wedding photographer, they will go to the photographer whose narrative in advertising is: *I am a wedding photographer*. Similarly, if they are looking for somebody to photograph headshots, they will find a photographer whose narrative in advertising is: *I am a headshot photographer*.

Erin realizes that she needs to pick one area of focus and learn to do this one area very well. The wedding, family portrait, and headshot genres are saturated. She discovers a realtor who is looking for a photographer to photograph the houses he is selling, and has not done this type of photography before, but decides to give it a try. She enjoys it very much and discovers that realtors have a difficult time finding photographers to work in this genre. Erin decides that she will focus on this genre. She also decides to raise her pricing. Being the sole in-demand worker in a particular field affords her the confidence to do this. Her business turns around surprisingly quickly. Erin hadn't realized that this was an untapped market and that there would be so much demand. Erin's business and advertising narrative now becomes: *You need my service, and I am worthwhile for you to hire*. She is able to start making a good amount of money in only a few months, and her business is able to be saved. Erin was able to craft a narrative whose value was perceived by her customer (the realtor), and she could stop trying to be all things to all (potential) customers.

When Erin fell in love with photography and found her flow, she imagined herself taking pictures of babies, pets, ballet dancers, gymnasts, maybe even some animals roaming around in nature. If someone had told her "You will end up photographing empty houses," that might have dampened her interest. But that was then, this is now, and she has prepared for this career, and needs to make it lucrative (or at least sustainable), so real estate photography is what she will specialize in. She still carries her camera on

weekend hikes and photographs people in outdoor recreation and forest creatures. Let that be her flow.

Detractors might say that Erin had "settled" for something less than following her passion. We have to view satisficing not as a defeat, but as an adult decision to serve the most important priorities within the complex (and sometimes competing) demands of utilitarian relevance.

The conjunctive approach also works for someone who has priorities that are quite different from those of Sarah or Erin. Stephanie is a smart girl but can't decide what major to study in college. She is feeling pressure as her family and teachers keep telling her that she needs to decide on a career, but she doesn't feel ready to pick what she wants to do for the rest of her life. Her family has a strong history in the accounting profession, so finally, upon having to make a decision, Stephanie thinks that she may as well follow family tradition, and declares math as her major. However, as Stephanie begins to take the more advanced math classes, she realizes she is not doing well, and she becomes very anxious. She gets a tutor and studies hard, but the further into her classes she gets, the worse she feels, and she withdraws from the classes. Her dead-end narrative at this point is that she is lost and may never discover a career that will be fulfilling.

She doesn't realize, but the reason that she is having this problem is that she is working from ulterior relevance. She is acting in a way that she thinks will please her family and teachers, and denying herself the subjects that she enjoys. Her narrative is: *if I satisfy my parents and teachers, I will also be satisfied*.

Stephanie is back at square one. Realizing that she made a mistake in taking math, and wanting to take a completely different direction, she declares art to be her major. In contrast to math, she has always had a talent for painting and graphic design, and thinks that this will be a good match. Her narrative is: *I took the wrong direction before, so the opposite direction will be correct*.

As the classes start and she gets further into the semester, however, she again finds herself unhappy. Stephanie is bored. She does have a talent for art but doesn't feel that she is being challenged. She decides again to drop the classes. Her problem was that she was again acting from a place of ulterior relevance – her choice to simply take the opposite direction was *irrational*, and therefore was not a well thought out plan.

By now, Stephanie is tired of declaring majors only to later drop them. It is summer and she takes the time to think about what she wants to do with

her life. Her friend invites her to a psychology seminar at a local event hall, knowing that the talk is on a subject that Stephanie is interested in. The talk is fascinating to Stephanie, and one thing has piqued her interest – the psychologist giving the talk mentions the concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

When Stephanie gets home, she researches the concept, and feels that a light has turned on in her mind. Upon discovering Csikszentmihalyi's flow chart, she now realizes why her career attempts have failed. The chart measures challenge level against skill level, and assesses the likely outcome of feelings based on where a person is on these two factors. When Stephanie took math, the challenge level was high, and her skill level was low, resulting in anxiety. When she took art, her skill level was high, and her challenge level was low, resulting in boredom. In addition, both kept her in the zone of ulterior relevance, which brought no fulfillment.

Stephanie's narrative had not been one of assessing the intersection of her skills, interests, and challenges, but instead one of fear, confusion, and trying to please others. When her friend invited her to the seminar, she unknowingly set Stephanie on the path that would lead to a successful and fulfilling career.

Stephanie has been reminded by the seminar of how much she enjoyed the psychology classes that she has taken. They were challenging but she did well in them and has a natural ability to understand people, so finds it to come naturally to her. Having studied the chart, Stephanie suspects that in declaring psychology as a major, she may enter a state of flow. The classes are challenging, but Stephanie enjoys them very much, and excels, later becoming a psychotherapist.

Once her decision-making process became one of objective self-assessment rather than haphazard guesswork, Stephanie entered flow and discovered a fulfilling career. Stephanie was making decisions from a place of ulterior relevance. Once she decided on a career that would be fulfilling to herself, she was able to discover utilitarian relevance, and find motivation to work hard towards a solid end goal. Now that Stephanie is a psychotherapist, she is fulfilled internally and feels that she is helping others, which leads to her experience of ultimate relevance.

The beautiful part about Stephanie's career decision is that she could make it while still in college, before she had to worry about syncing with a future husband's career or juggling childcare responsibilities. The more

additional roles we take on (like Sarah, the now single parent) the lower priority we can give to finding a career that promises flow.

Ellen was always the quiet girl; so quiet, in fact, that it occasionally led to some uncomfortable interactions with her peers and even some teachers. By the time she was a teen, the narrative had devolved to, "The way I am is wrong. I need to change to fit in." However, the more she tried to fit in, the less at ease and more inauthentic she felt. She had not discovered her context within the world and was getting frustrated trying to fit in as a fake extrovert. Although she was the author, director, and actor of her life's narrative, and definitely in control of her actions, in trying to take on the values of her peers, she was not acting in a way that was genuine to her. Her grades suffered, and this made her feel less happy.

In her early twenties, Ellen decided to embark on a journey of discovering her true self. She had taken a few jobs, and none had felt like a correct fit. She also felt that the people surrounding her, while considered friends, were not people she felt entirely comfortable around. You could say that she disliked the plot (narrative) of her life and made the (director's) decision to change it. In other words, her narrative was: "I am not connected to the world in a way that suits me, and I want to discover where that connection is."

When Ellen begins this process, she has to start at a basic level of learning what her values are. She writes down all of the things that interest her and discovers that her passion seems to lie mostly in the area of animals. She volunteers at an animal shelter for a couple of weeks and discovers that her life seems to suddenly fit into place. Her values are strongly pulling her towards helping animals. At this point, her narrative becomes: "I must work to make my life fit the values that I have discovered."

Ellen decides to go back to school to work towards becoming a veterinary assistant. She meets people there who have similar values, and they immediately become friends. Ellen realizes that she doesn't have much in common with the people she has been friends with until now, and slowly finds herself drifting away from them. As she directs her life into a direction that aligns with her true self, she seems to be attracting people who make her feel more like her authentic self. In other words, the actions she is now taking are leading to a successful outcome. Her narrative has become: "I am now living in a way that is true to myself. I am therefore feeling secure and confident that the actions I take will lead to outcomes that are good for my life."

Ellen was able to find flow and fulfillment in her work because she had decided to put that quest as the highest priority in her life. In order to accomplish that, the untold story is that she had to put some other things on hold (getting a mate and starting a family). The conjunctive decision making would have had a different set of priorities and options if she had married a petroleum engineer who came home one evening to tell her, "Sorry, you won't be able to finish that vet tech program. We're moving to Alaska next week."

Many of us make important career decisions constrained by strong commitments to our families or morality. Christopher works as a marketer for a meat company. How this vegan wound up there is very instructive. He still struggles with the moral dilemma of this situation.

When he left college, he struggled to find work, and had to move back in with his parents while he took low-paying jobs in retail. His priority at that point was: "My motivation is to leave my parents' home. I need to save money however I can until I get a well-paying job. Retail is low stress and is helping me to save money for now."

This continues for a few years, and now Christopher is twenty-six years old and meets the woman who he plans to marry. He proposes, and the couple must decide when to hold the wedding. The two sets of parents will pay for some of the wedding, but Christopher and his fiancé must raise the rest of the funds themselves. Christopher has managed to save some, but not enough for this expense. At this point, Christopher's narrative becomes: "I need a well-paying job so that I can begin my life with my wife."

Christopher had become comfortable in his retail position and slacked in his search for a job in the field he majored in for his degree – marketing. Now that he is motivated by the desire to marry and share living space with his fiancé, he realizes that the search for a job in marketing must resume. It is a tough market, and Christopher again struggles to find a job in his field. Interview after interview fails to yield the desired results, and Christopher is frustrated. Still, the motivation to be with his fiancé is his main narrative, and this pushes him to continue the search.

Finally, Christopher is offered a job. He applied for work with a company that produces beverages and meats. He wasn't happy with the thought of working for a company that sells meat, but stresses that he is a vegan and is applying for the beverage marketing half of the company. The company likes Christopher and wants to hire him. They tell him that they have filled the beverage marketing spots and can only offer him a position in

marketing meat. Christopher takes some time to think about the offer. His views on veganism are strong; however, his feelings towards his fiancé are stronger, and he agrees to take the job. His narrative at this point is: "It is a tough job market. I will have to work against my ethical values, but I am lucky to get a job, I will be able to start a life with my fiancé. I can continue to search for a job in a market that I am not morally opposed to." Is this an unethical narrative? Has Christopher sold out for a bigger paycheck?

We see in Christopher a person who has been complacent (shown by his justification of *saving money* while taking the action of the easy job that makes little money) turning into a person who is driven (shown by his motivation of starting a new life and taking the action of finding a high-paying job). This justifies the moral quandary of selling meat while holding the judgment that eating meat is bad.

Very few of us are committed vegans like Chris, but all of us will find similar ethical dilemmas in life:

- The cocktail server who is a teetotaler
- The convenience store clerk who has to ring up a purchase of cigarettes
- The casino blackjack dealer who has forsworn gambling
- The pro-life nurse who works in a hospital that performs abortions
- The fundamentalist desk clerk who gives a hotel room to two men

Each of us must find our own comfort zones with our work, but at what point does our "righteous indignation" at the behavior of others fall into the ulterior relevance of obsession?

- A vegan taxi driver refuses to take an older woman home from the grocery store because she has purchased a jar of honey (which is made by exploiting bees).
- A pharmacy clerk (who is committed to sex only between a husband and wife) refuses to sell condoms because they might be used by fornicators (or gay men)?

Our personal decisions about what we will, and will not, partake in does not give us license to dictate what others may choose. It should merely give

us cause to reflect about what level of participation we can justify in our jobs and as members of society.

Another aspect of role compatibility in the job market is the fit between the individual worker and the employer (whether that be a small firm, a large corporation, or a government agency). Each of these workplaces develops its own culture, sometimes even very different from other places in the same city or same industry. If a worker is right for a particular career, he may not be right for a particular employer. There may be a fundamental clash of values or a simple mismatch of expectations.

Henry has worked in retail for over a decade and has come to accept that this may be his lifetime career. The store in which he has worked for over a year prides itself on the friendly atmosphere the customer feels when in the store. Henry, however, is often in a snippy mood. He refuses to welcome customers when they enter, despite the many times his manager has requested that he do so, doesn't eat lunch with his coworkers, and was one time caught up in a tense situation with a customer who wanted a refund that Henry considered unreasonable (although the store policy is to always grant refunds, regardless of the grounds).

Both customers and coworkers find him difficult and unpleasant to interact with. Part of this comes from his dry sense of humor, and part from Henry's idea that a man of his talents deserves a better clientele. Henry does not live up to the store's narrative of the friendly atmosphere. Although Henry's behavior may be acceptable in other work locations, and even among his friends and family, it does not fit the expectations of his employer and Henry eventually loses this job. The boss is happier. The co-workers are happier. The customers are happier. Here's who else *should* be happier - Henry.

He does not need to change his personality, but Henry's narrative needs to be finely tuned in the wake of his dismissal. The worst thing for him would be to wallow in the dead-end narrative of victimhood - they had it in for me because I'm:

- An introvert
- An atheist
- Politically vocal
- Gay
- Short

No, Henry, it wasn't because of any of those things. Indeed, they put up with you as long as they did because some of those resonated with the boss. Try this narrative: "I've been snide with my boss and coworkers because I see better ways to run a store or to attract the right clientele. This is my chance to take my savings and start my only boutique, and run it my way, hiring my team who will reflect a culture built on my ideas."

Consumer: You Are What You Purchase

One of the major roles in contemporary society is that of the consumer. People ease into this role earlier and earlier in life, as evidenced by children in the supermarket nudging (or screaming at) their parents to get them a toy, candy, or box of cereal. This is a role where one of the first battles between free will and external pressures may be fought. Those external pressures include parents, peers, and advertisers. Children who lose this battle become stuck in ulterior relevance (but often don't even recognize this because they have been taught that all products on the marketplace have some utilitarian relevance).

Because we have physical bodies that are subject to hunger, thirst, cold, and discomfort, we can never fully escape the pull of utilitarian relevance. The goods and services provided by the marketplace will have their attraction. But advertisers want to sell us more than what we truly need (and at a higher price). Economists tell us that price is all about supply and demand, and a "rational" consumer is going to purchase the cheaper of two equal products. So, you go to the store and see two boxes of cornflakes. You check the box for net weight, even nutritional value, and lo and behold they are equal. Now, do you behave like the rational consumer and purchase the cheaper box? Marketers have realized that if you *perceive* a difference between the two products, you can be induced to pay more for one of them. Perhaps it tastes better (because powdered sugar has been poured into the box). Perhaps the box has a picture of a cartoon character or a famous athlete to make the child indicate a preference for that box (and make the mother pay another dollar for that box).

What has just happened? You have ceased functioning as a rational consumer in the realm of utilitarian relevance and are making an emotional decision in the realm of ulterior relevance. It is not just children. Is Starbucks coffee really that much better than the store brand instant you can mix at

home? Is the real attraction of Starbucks more in having a nice place to go where you can do some work (or just relax) away from home? Is there some value in having a Starbucks cup that you can show off in your office to let your co-workers know that you have such sophisticated taste that no generic coffee will do?

Perhaps the greatest example would be clothing. The price is more determined by fashion than by comfort (and certainly not durability). Another example would be wine. Can people really taste the difference between Charles Shaw ("Two Buck Chuck") from Trader Joe's and varietals of a certain region and vintage? Are you trying to impress your dinner guests, or do you really taste the difference (and could that extra money be spent on something else that is really more important)?

Advertising campaigns are less about explaining objective advantages of a product and more about creating a narrative that will appeal to some ulterior relevance: this is what "sophisticated" adults or "cool" kids are doing this year.

A recent trend in consumerism has been to value experiences more than material stuff. This may make sense if the memories last longer than the stuff (and/or anticipation of the experience is more intense). Advertising can easily build that anticipation. Unfortunately, the reality is that too many of us merely remember the hassles of waiting in line to get those things, followed by the burdens of paying off the resulting debt. As long as the decision was based solely on some hedonic calculation (e.g., that great meal at the restaurant was worth the cost and worth the time waiting in line) we can justify the decision under the realm of utilitarian relevance.

However, when we pursue certain experiences or material possessions simply because we feel compelled to do so, regardless of the suffering involved, that falls into the realm of ulterior relevance. When I (TLB) first became a suburban homeowner, I purchased a lawnmower and cutting the grass became a weekly ritual (it was as if I did not have sufficient penance at confession, I had to mow the lawn, until I had sweated and wheezed enough to expiate seven days of sin). A few years later, I hired a gardener to mow the lawn. Then after much frustration with different gardeners, I decided that the lawn just didn't matter to me, or at least the thought of being a drought-conscious citizen mattered more. I escaped from the lawn obsession. I was happy that my unkempt front yard better fit my narrative of being a responsible suburbanite. Now, there is a "minimalist movement" of having

smaller houses with fewer pieces of furniture. That fits my desire for other aspects of condominium life.

Abraham Maslow would be rolling over in his grave if he could see how his pyramidal model of needs is being used to sell products and services. Things that serve legitimate physical or safety needs are being pitched with narratives that emphasize the three higher levels of needs: belonging to the group, self-esteem, even self-actualization. I need a convenient, reliable, safe automobile (at least in southern California) but when the advertisement emphasizes that it will make me fulfilled or give me a leg up on social status in my neighborhood, it is appealing to ulterior relevance.

A healthy life narrative is not overly concerned with how snobs will judge us on our clothes, cars, or wine (or job titles). If we are merely trying to meet snob standards with our occupations and consumption, we are stuck in ulterior relevance (owning status symbols, working in status jobs, sending our kids to status undergraduate residential colleges). If we are trying to maximize our pleasure, comfort, and convenience (and that of others) then we are working in the realm of utilitarian relevance. Only when we can say that our occupational and marketplace behavior nurtures the agency of ourselves and others do we approach a calling within the realm of ultimate relevance.

The same conjunctive decision-making that works with job selection should be used for our purchases of products and services in the marketplace. The bigger the purchase, the more essential it is to use this satisficing approach. It is permissible to use impulse buying for a pack of gum, but when purchasing a home, you need to outline your priorities and options.

Remember young Jack and his (first) wife? After they had been married a few years, they had enough for a down payment on a house. When she finished her credentialing program, they knew they could handle a mortgage. They wanted to start a family, and their responsible middle-class sequencing dictated that they should buy a home first.

They began by outlining their priorities:

- Monthly payments that they could afford
- Large enough for two kids: three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a family room
- Safe neighborhood
- Good schools close by

- Easy commute to work

The last two factors were ranked as the lowest criteria only because if school or work needs changed in the next decade, they would be moving.

As their real estate agent showed them a sequence of a dozen homes for sale (the options), the couple used their priorities to progressively remove each alternative from the short list of what was acceptable.

- That house out in Banning was just too far away from work
- The first one in Redlands was too small.
- That other one in Redlands was perfect on four criteria, but well beyond the maximum acceptable price range
- The one in San Bernardino was OK in size and price, but in a neighborhood that was not the safest or with acceptable schools

Eventually they saw a house in Mentone. It was not the biggest, or the cheapest. The neighborhood was satisfactory in terms of safety and schools, but not as good as the ones in Redlands. The commute was better than Banning, but not as good as San Bernardino. So, this place in Mentone was not the best on any criterion, but it was at least minimally acceptable on all of them. It satisficed on every priority, so that is the home that they purchased.

Ethical concerns are important when it comes to what we purchase in the marketplace (perhaps even more so than what we produce or sell). Christopher could reconcile selling meat to others, but he would have had a harder time eating it himself. Of course, the real question will be in terms of his willingness to serve meat or dairy to dinner guests at his home. Will he punish his children for having a hamburger at a friend's house?

Relationships: Finding and Keeping Significant Others

In the 21st century, it has become challenging to find an appropriate name for this section: marriage? significant others? relationships? mate selection and retention? Although we see new forms and guidelines evolving here, it remains one of the most important areas of adult life.

Rather than view this as pure romantic attraction based upon "chemistry" we contend that this area of life requires wise decision-making, just like choosing an employer, deciding on a vacation destination, or buying a refrigerator (except that getting the right spouse is even more important and therefore should require more careful deliberation and conscious effort).

Daniel is twenty-nine years old and is ready to meet somebody to settle down with. He has tried dating via traditional approaches (contacts via friends and family) but yielded no suitable match. He decides to download an app and make a profile. He struggles with knowing what to write on his profile. The problem he is having is that he feels that each of his values in life shows outwardly in a different way. His own life narrative is not one neatly tied box but is an ever-changing and interacting set of different roles and competing values. He is not sure how to tie these together into one straightforward profile.

A very important current role is that he has with his close friends. In this role, Daniel is outgoing and fun. He jokes around and may sometimes be irresponsible or do something that he is not proud of later on. At work, his role is that of a serious and reliable employee, hoping to rise on the organization's chart. In this role, he would never discuss the activities he takes part in with his friends as he feels that this crossing of roles would adversely impact his career. He does not want his coworkers or boss to know how easily he can make rude remarks or get drunk and stay out too late. Another important role in Daniel's life is being the owner of a dog. Here he takes on an almost paternal role.

His most enduring role is that of a family member. He is an only child so has a small family, maintaining a wonderful relationship with his parents, and sees family as an important role. However, he is at a time in his life at which he is pulling away from their influence and discovering who he is as an individual. Although his parents have always been proud of him, he has disappointed them at points during his teenage years. Mom and Dad do not always agree with his adult decisions, particularly those of his political views and how many women he dates (or, maybe it is the kind of women he is dating).

Even some of these women see him as uncaring and immature, as he does not deliver what they would like from him in a relationship. Others who first meet him at a party with his friends see the fun side, and are attracted to him, but then when they see his stodgier side, they figure that the party is over.

Daniel feels that he is several different people, trying to match one of the roles he fulfils in life, and unable to meld a uniform narrative. Daniel has excessive competition between his roles. He feels that 'who he is' is dependent on 'who he is with' and 'what situation he is in'. He could justify any of his behaviors as reflecting his values (but which value is salient at a time is at best transitory). Erikson would explain Daniel's life at this point as a failure to resolve the identity diffusion of adolescence.

In signing up for a dating app, Daniel notices that he is only allowed to write three sentences for his profile and does not know how to describe himself. The writing of this concise profile has become a moment of truth. He has recognized that he has come to a fork in life's road. He has to prioritize his values, favor some roles over others, and tighten up his narrative. Otherwise, he is unlikely to form a long-term relationship with a woman, and even less likely to get one that will fit in with his preferred course of life.

Although Daniel was drawn in many directions by his competing values and diverse roles, he decided to get some advice from his rabbi. This surprised Daniel himself (as well as his parents) because he had lost touch with religion after his Bar Mitzvah. Most of the girls he had been dating were not Jewish (nor were they even religious, so he figured that religion was not going to be a factor in the relationship). But Daniel always respected the wisdom of the old rabbi, and thought it would be worthwhile to get the elder's perspective. When Daniel walked into the old office in the synagogue, the rabbi displayed the great smile of recognizing a familiar face, and then praised what a good and smart boy Daniel always was. "You know, I never had a son of my own, and had always hoped that you might consider becoming a rabbi." Daniel was shocked, but very flattered. He had been close to his rabbi, but never thought that he had the calling to study scriptures or lead a congregation through important life challenges.

The rabbi seemed content when Daniel recounted the growing success in his chosen career. When Daniel got around to talking about his problems finding and keeping a girlfriend, the rabbi had some strange advice, that Daniel at first dismissed. "I'm an old man now," said the rabbi, "and any advice I could give you might have been appropriate for your parents' generation, but for today, who knows"? As Daniel got up to leave, the rabbi said one more thing "To answer this question, you must not ask a man of the past, but a man of the future, a good and wise man. Ask your future self."

A few days later, Daniel returned to the task of writing the short profile, and again found it to be an endeavor beyond his efforts. He recalled the advice of the rabbi, and chuckled, but why not? Daniel imagined himself five, ten, twenty years in the future. There was no way that he would become a rabbi, but he wanted to be that wise and good man the rabbi had seen in him. He could not envision himself continuing with the party scene. He wanted more financial success going up the corporate ladder. He might not have the same dog in five or ten years, but he definitely wanted to have a dog to care for and play with (or maybe a couple of kids, or better yet, kids *and* a dog). Now, Daniel started to listen to his future self, and it became more obvious that he needed to prioritize one set of values and roles over the others. That realization helped him write his brief profile (and solidify his narrative as someone who lives for the future and not just for today's pleasures).

Daniel eventually meets a girl from the app for a date, and presents a man who is responsible, chivalrous, charming, and polite. He had occasionally played this role before, but inconsistently because it turned off most of the party girls. But now, Daniel realizes that this woman is different from the other women he has dated, and desires to pursue the relationship further, because she sees Daniel's future self (and has fallen in love with it). As this happens, he notices that his role within the relationship begins to change. He remains the responsible, chivalrous, charming, and polite man who dated her, but he is now comfortable revealing some of his other roles as well. As he introduces her to his family, the loyal and softer part of his personality shows – those values that are strongly attached to his mother. As the girlfriend begins to stay at his house more, they begin to share the value of caring for the dog. His fun and slightly irresponsible side is not entirely dead, but it is withering away. He introduces his fiancé to some of his friends but finds that this new couple is more fun on their own.

In the case of Daniel, an external force – the arrival of a woman in his life – has rearranged the values in his life and given him a new focus, one life narrative. He still has different areas of different values, and different roles to enact, but they are now connected under a stable narrative of one person who has a strong sense of future-oriented identity. As Duckworth (2019) states, "Culture has the power to shape our identity. Over time and under the right circumstances, the norms and values of the group to which we belong become our own. We internalize them."

We are not always able to answer the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg? Did Daniel change because of the presence of this woman, or did his internal change bring the woman into his life? Life is not a series of temporally and spatially delimited events that readily bear the labels of causes and effects. We are not passive observers of a *sequence* of billiard balls hitting other billiard balls. We are the *process* guided by the continuous and creative reformulations of our narrative.

The conjunctive decision-making approach is as appropriate for mate selection as it was for choosing a job or apartment. We have some criteria (which need to be prioritized) and we have a range of options (limited by our range of possible contacts and our own meager claims of attractiveness). Fortunately, with the rise of dating websites and apps, the number of possible contacts has increased exponentially.

Unfortunately, many marriages (or at least serious relationships resulting in offspring) are those founded on only one criterion: a passionate sexual attraction. That is rarely a sufficient basis for a good marriage, and never an enduring one. Some non-romantic criteria that need to be included into the conjunctive exclusion equation would be factors such as:

- Laziness
- Infidelity
- Financial irresponsibility
- Chronic mental illness (unless you are prepared for the breakdowns)
- Addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling)
- Children from a previous relationship (unless you are willing to stepparent)

Notice that this list does not include religion. Here we have to remember the definition of religion from way back in chapter#3: a system of doctrines, ethics, rituals, myths, and symbols for the expression of ultimate relevance.

Is doctrine really a problem for most couples in mixed denominational matrimony? "I'm going right to heaven when I die, and you Catholics are going to be stuck in purgatory and you can't even tell me for how long? I don't know if I can wait." (You'll be in heaven, you can wait.) Are symbols going to preclude a happy home: plain cross or crucifix? Mezuzah or shrine to Vishnu? What about myths - do we retell the story of the exodus from Egypt or the stable in Bethlehem?

The real problems with religious conflict come when we move from the purely abstract to the realm of ritual and ethical behaviors. Do we get our baby boy circumcised or baptized? Is the baptism a sprinkling as an infant or a full immersion as a young adult? Back up further - what kind of birth control options are we OK with? Who exactly performs the ceremony, my priest or your rabbi?

One of the best tools for a successful marriage is a decision responsibility guide (the more explicit the better). This boils down to who is in charge of what. Democracy doesn't work when there are only two votes and every heated issue results in a tie.

The solution is to agree on assigning each spouse the appropriate level of authority on each topic.

1. I have the complete authority to make the decision, and don't even have to tell you about it. Example, coming home from work I decided to stop at one gas station instead of another. It does not matter which one I stopped at; the tank is now full. I don't have to give my wife the details.

2. I have the complete authority to make the decision but agree to inform my wife when the decision has been made. Example, I decided *not* to stop and get gas on the way home. The tank is only a quarter full, so I'll tell her before she takes the car.

3. I have authority to make the decision but agree to get her advice before the decision is made. I might still choose to disregard her input or over-rule a specific request, but at least she had a chance to give input. Example, before I leave the office, I ask if I should stop and get gas, or could that wait until tomorrow?

4. I have authority to make the decision, but she has veto power. I must consult with her before the decision and will remove a course of action if she objects to it. Example, we need a vehicle for the family, and this is something that we will both be driving. I want a big truck because that best suits my needs. She wants to be able to use it for errands and won't be able to park it downtown. The veto holds - we will either get a smaller truck or get two vehicles.

In many other areas, it is my wife who has the primary authority, and I play the subordinate role of being informed, giving advice, or having a veto. It matters less which decision is made on a specific topic, or even which role each spouse has. What matters is that both spouses are satisfied with the roles they have, and both fulfil their roles adequately. The greater one's level of input, the more one must assume responsibility for the outcomes.

There is only one thing worse than a sore loser who says "I told you so" when the results are bad. The worst thing is the sore winner who keeps on arguing after getting his way.

"How selfish you were not to let me do this my way before." (OK, we are *now* doing it your way, so shut up or next time we won't be doing it your way.)

"The lines at this restaurant were so long, and the service was horrible, and the food was not worth the price." (OK, but *you* chose the restaurant. I just wanted a hot dog at the food truck, so don't blame me.)

A form of this sore winner is being hypercritical when someone is giving exceptional help or asking for even more than was originally offered. Joe usually mows the lawn and does a first-class job. One weekend there is a great schedule of basketball on TV, and he knows that if he goes out to mow the lawn before the predicted afternoon rains, he will miss his favorite teams. His wife, Gracie, is familiar with the mower and figures she can do the grass in about a half hour, so she volunteers. It takes a little longer than expected but she's done, and Joe was able to see his game. In addition, she was able to make it to a bridal shower for one of her friends. The next day, Joe makes it outside and notices that although the lawn is cut, the sides are not neatly edged, and the sidewalks have some stray clippings. It is nothing like the neat, professional-quality work he does. Joe should be appreciative of what he got, and not complain about the little extra that he expected (and she never promised). If you want to have a successful marriage, aim to please your spouse, and more importantly, be easy to please.

Perhaps the important thing in developing a healthy marriage is finding a spouse who will support our own healthy narrative:

- I am a good parent
- I am a good provider
- I am the family kinkeeper

The worst person to marry is someone who pushes us into a dead-end narrative or even applauds our dead-end narratives justifying bad behavior. If Daniel had married one of those party girls, what would his mother think? What would his rabbi think? What would his future self think? The first two may not matter, but the last one does.

Parenting: How Not to Create Dead-End Narratives in Your Kids

Probably the most difficult of all of our adult roles is that of being a parent to a young child.

Any parent who has more than one child knows the importance of temperament-based differences. You figure that Johnny (age 3), and his little brother Jimmy (age 2) came from the same sperm supply and the same egg factory, and you have really tried to treat them the same, but what worked with Johnny doesn't work with Jimmy. Parents are not usually astounded by the other direction - where some area was a challenge with Johnny but now easy with Jimmy is attributed to the parents acquiring greater skills via practice with the first child. Regardless of the similarities of heredity and environment, siblings will not be identical. The intrauterine environment differs for each pregnancy, as does the family's interpersonal environment (especially birth order). A related factor is that the parent is not in the same place for each child (or even for the same child at different points in the relationship).

Many social roles, when performed correctly, maximize our agency. A good spouse maximizes our agency. So does a good government. However, if you hope that being a parent will maximize your agency, you are not a good parent. The trick in being a good parent is not to maximize your agency, but the agency of your child, by carefully cultivating willpower. This is obviously not accomplished by being an overprotective or helicopter parent, in such a way that the child never learns to exercise his or her own will by choosing among alternatives (and accepting the consequences for those decisions). But neither is this accomplished by giving the child too much freedom too soon before the child has a real sense of long-term consequences of certain actions.

A great technique to gauge the willpower of a child was employed in the research of Walter Mischel (2019). If we want to go beyond the philosophical question of free will (Does free will exist?) To the scientific problem of measurement, we start with an operational definition: identifying a specific behavior that will be accepted as an indication of free will. Mischel had an adult present four-year-olds with a marshmallow, telling them that the adult would have to go away for a few minutes, and if the child could wait until the adult got back before eating the marshmallow, then the child would be rewarded with an additional marshmallow. About half the children ate the first marshmallow right after being left alone with it.

The most interesting thing about Mischel's study was not how the children behaved at age four, but what a follow-up revealed about them at age 18. Those youngsters who resisted temptation and had the willpower to wait for the second marshmallow became highschoolers with higher SAT scores. Those who could not resist eating the first marshmallow right away had poorer emotional health and more behavioral problems. Subsequent research has replicated Mischel's findings, but also noted the importance of such factors as how long the children are told to wait and the kind of social norms that were implied.

Mischel's colleague at Stanford, Albert Bandura (2006), was also interested in how we can develop willpower (what he called *agency*) in a child. It is necessary to provide the child with a safe space in which the child may practice choosing between alternatives. Additionally, the most powerful form of learning a parent can present to a child is not simple reward and punishment, but *modeling*: providing the child with an example of how a competent adult does something.

Bandura's most famous experiment was that of the Bobo Doll (which was about as tall as the children and would return to a standing position after being pushed or hit down). Children were randomly divided into two different rooms. In one room, the adult model treated Bobo kindly, as a doll. In the other room, the adult treated Bobo as a punching bag. Children mimicked the behavior of the adult, treating the Bobo Doll in the way that they had seen the adult behave.
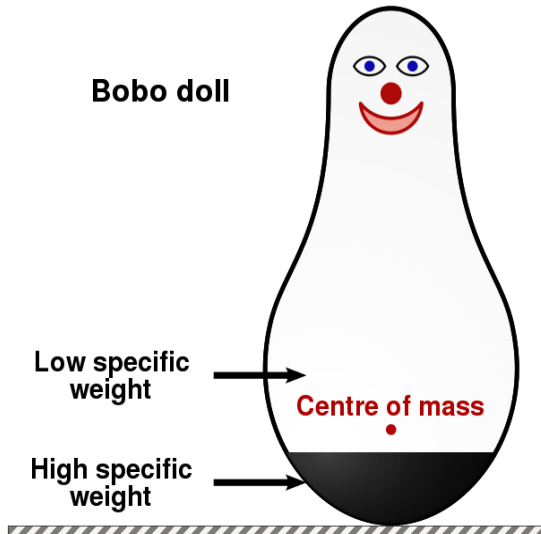
Good parenting is guiding children to help them make optimal choices: those that are both wise and altruistic. Through modeling, we can instill in children a respect for both the utilitarian (getting what we ourselves need) and the ultimate (respecting the personhood of others). We need to praise our children for their acts of kindness, not just for winning at sports or mastering academic skills.

Each day gives us parents dozens of teachable moments in which we model wise decision-making, or better yet, present our children with an opportunity to practice their decision-making skills.

Good parenting is more than acting in a correct or nice fashion within a social context. The challenge is to talk about it with the child so that the child develops a narrative capable of self-motivated achievement as well as moral restraint.

Here the work of Carol Dweck (2017) is instructive. Her view is that the optimal approach to teaching children academic skills is to inculcate the *growth mindset*. All children are going to bump up against some task (physical or academic) that is not readily mastered. A frequent reaction is to say, "I just don't have the math gene" and give up trying to learn. Certainly, some children do have learning disabilities that may affect their ability to read, do arithmetic, keep time to the music, or hit a fastball. What Dweck recommended was to emphasize growth mindset: "You have not mastered that *yet*" (implying that it is a matter of time and effort, so don't give up).

Here is the greatest paradox of learning: it takes willpower to employ a growth mindset, but it takes a growth mindset to develop willpower. The four year olds who ate the marshmallow lacked willpower, and did not develop enough of a growth mindset to score better on the SAT fourteen years later. So, your role as parent is to demonstrate your own willpower and praise your child's (slow but ongoing) growth of the willpower needed for success in academics, sports, the arts, and altruism.

Lev Vygotsky described teaching young children as building cognitive scaffolding. Rather than referring to Piaget's fixed stages, Vygotsky was concerned with dynamic levels of cognitive and physical capacity. At any point in a child's development, there are three levels of the child's capabilities:

- What is so hard the child could not accomplish it, even with adult help
- What is somewhat hard, but that which the child could do it with some adult help
- What is so easy that the child could do it without adult help.

Too many Piagetians assume that we have to wait until something falls into this lowest level before we teach it, because only then will the child be at the stage of being able to do it. Vygotsky wanted to focus on the middle level. The adult had to do more than merely model the new task but construct the cognitive scaffolding that would enable the child to try with some help, encouragement, and guidance. Think of training wheels on a bicycle. Once the child has learned the task, it is now at the child's own capacity and the scaffolding (training wheels) can be removed.

Barbara Tversky (2019) has also tempered the ideas of Piaget by outlining various laws of child development that certainly indicate a role for the child's developing narrative:

- 3rd law: feeling comes first
- 7th law: the mind fills in missing information
- 9th law: we organize the stuff in world the way we organize stuff in the mind

Here's the takeaway for parents: get your children to talk about what they are feeling, how they are thinking, and why they are making certain decisions. It's OK to have certain feelings, but you can come up with better ideas and choose better responses.

Diana Baumrind identified different styles of parenting on these dimensions: how demanding and how responsive. This yields a two-by-two contingency table with four quadrants. The easiest to understand would be the neglectful, just ignoring the children and hoping that they don't get into too much mischief. The indulgent approach is more permissive, providing emotional support (if not outright approval) for the child's whims. The authoritarian approach emphasizes the rights of the parent and the duties of the child: be quiet, be obedient, do your chores, and earn your keep. Baumrind maintains that the authoritative style is the preferred approach: emphasizing modeling encouragement, and cognitive processing of the child's experiences ("How do you feel? How does it make others feel? What do you think we should …"?)

	demanding	not demanding
responsive	authoritative	indulgent
not responsive	authoritarian	neglectful

Each of these approaches takes a different view on the child's narratives. The neglectful approach doesn't care about the child's narrative. The authoritarian parent says, "This is *my* narrative and it's going to be yours." The indulgent parent permits the child to develop a narrative, but then the parent is afraid to criticize or guide that narrative. The authoritative parent looks at the developing narrative and interacts with it, supporting the child's efforts to fine tune it into one that will achieve socially approved goals.

One of the great failures of parenting is not teaching a child about how to use willpower to control anger. Neglectful parents ignore it. Permissive parents focus on the child's right to experience such feelings (often while failing to teach how to control the subsequent aggressive behaviors). Authoritarian parents may succeed in stifling aggressive behavior, but it is not clear if the underlying anger continues to create other, internal problems in some cases. Ideally, the authoritative approach recognizes, then gets beyond, the anger so that aggressive behavior is not mobilized.

However, one failure of non-authoritarian parents is that the children may not learn how to deal with authority figures in the real world.

Some parents teach their children how to become defiant victims while other parents teach their children how to find solutions. The former approach is deadly when it comes to confrontations with authority figures (e.g., the police). The worst thing to teach a child is that anger justifies bad behavior. Not only will your child behave badly, but he will remain in an angry mood in order to justify his actions. He may become a more difficult fit for most relationships and careers.

> "Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child."
> - Jonathan Haidt

If successful, authoritative parenting cultivates the child's notion of agency, and supports that notion with an evolving narrative to guide interaction with the world. *I am a willful and effective agent, capable of controlling and predicting my environment, or at least my interaction with it.*

Chapter 8

Resilience and Transformation

We are emotional beings who feel deeply, narrate continuously, and reason occasionally. We are going to feel some sadness, fear, and anger in life, but those emotions do not have to be so intense as to dominate our lives.

In the Sixth Century B.C.E., Gautama Siddhartha sat under a tree and realized the First Noble Truth: that life is suffering, and he became known as the Buddha. Twenty-five centuries later, all human beings still experience suffering, though in different degrees and forms. Some individuals have more bodily aches, some experience more economic privations, some live under political tyranny. Psychologists focus more on the suffering due to the role problems discussed in the last chapter: incompatibility, conflict, rapid transition, timing, overload, and underload.

What distinguishes people from each other is not *whether* they experience suffering, but *how* they respond to that suffering.

There are more formal definitions of resilience, such as that of the APA dictionary (2021)

> "Resilience: *n.* the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands."

So, that is *what* resilience is, but we need to figure out *how* to be resilient. Jordan Peterson (2021) gave this simple advice for successful living.

> "Do not do what you hate. Do not allow yourself to become resentful, deceitful, or arrogant. Be grateful in spite of your suffering."

But perhaps that begs the question: how can we avoid falling into resentfulness, and how do we nurture gratitude?

These are matters of wisdom and willpower. Wisdom is the talent for comparing different values and realizing what should really upset us. Some things which you are making the source of your suffering should not be, for example, that others do not share your narrative. As good as your narrative seems to be to you, it is a mistake to expect others to share it. They need to respect your narrative, and accept you, but you must not expect them to live by your narrative. This is especially true for narratives in the form of religious doctrine or political ideology. I don't accept Latter-day Saint, Islamic, or Watchtower doctrine, but I respect sincere Mormons, Muslims, and Jehovah Witnesses who commit themselves to living it.

Another aspect of wisdom is to avoid self-blame. It is tempting to look at problems in later life and trace them back to one mistake, e.g., going for a ride with the wrong person or not pursuing some opportunity. However, the biggest difference in lifetime flourishing is not a single mistake we make or accident that befalls us, but lack of wisdom or resilience. Most people can rebound from an auto accident, bankruptcy, bad marriage, unemployment, or death of a loved one.

Leon, born in 1920, had his share of mistakes and bad luck: being born into a poor family, coming of age during the depression, an unwise first marriage at age 19, malaria from his infantry service in the south Pacific, not going to college on the GI bill, three different cancers in his sixties. Yet, he did not dwell on these problems, but worked hard, made wiser choices later on (e.g., marrying his second wife), avoided bad behaviors, and died at 91, expressing his great happiness for a life well-lived. His modesty was exceeded only by his gratitude.

The worst thing you can do after a small mistake is to dwell on it and convince yourself that you are doomed. The best thing you can do after a small mistake is to learn from it.

All of this takes willpower, which we understand to be the courage and the capacity to act upon wisdom.

Courage is the propensity for channeling our efforts to the best set of values. The future may be unknowable, but it is not unwillable. Willpower is a habit developed by practice. Exercising it in the short term might lead to depletion (Baumeister, 2011) but in the long term, exercise strengthens a muscle.

Resilience requires willpower, not giving up on the spiritual task of actualizing the highest values, always using our roles to nurture others rather

than one's own fragile notion of self-esteem - operate altruistically in the realm of utilitarian relevance, not selfishly in the realm of ulterior relevance.

Viktor Frankl developed his approach to psychotherapy, Logotherapy, based upon insights refined while spending three years in a concentration camp. His most famous book was titled *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006), initially published under the title *A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp* (1946), in German.

Frankl described the meaning as a search (implying that it was something that could be discovered, but perhaps only after effort). We affirm Frankl's idea that willpower is the key to resilience, but we question whether our highest values (ultimate relevance) are "discovered." We see them as being created. We do not discover ourselves but create ourselves via narrative.

Carrie is fifty-two years old when her third and youngest child leaves home for college and her husband declares that he is leaving her. He says that he hasn't loved her for a very long time and that he remained with her only for their children to have a stable home life. Further, he has already been in another relationship for two years now, and they plan to marry as soon as they are able.

Carrie is devastated. She had no idea that this was going to happen. She is still in love with her husband and was looking forward to their time alone with no kids at home. When he leaves the house, she feels lost and alone. Further, they had always split the household chores and now Carrie is well-versed in performing her own but has no idea how to do the things that her husband has done for years.

Weeks pass and most of Carrie's time is spent crying, watching television, and ordering food to be delivered. She feels empty and that there is no point in her existence without her husband. Her previous narrative was built upon these expectations: *I have a secure and loving family and life and have an exciting future ahead of me*. It has now become: *I have no security, my children and husband have left, and I can't see a future that I want to live for*.

Over the next few months, Carrie's moods swing wildly as she remains sad that her husband has left but learns to do the household chores that he did previously. She slowly builds a sense of confidence and accomplishment from each new achievement. She is not happy that this is her new life but is learning to accept it. She is showing herself that she can, to some degree, control and change her mood, and can build on her abilities. Her narrative

has become: *I am not happy with the situation that I am in, but I am now confident that I can survive it.* This new narrative is the beginning of resilience if she can maintain her wisdom and willpower.

Carrie continues in this way for a year. She lives the life she lived before her husband left, but her husband is not there. The only noticeable difference is that she performs extra jobs around the house. The next summer, her children come home from college and tell Carrie that they are concerned about her. They want her to be truly happy again and to live a fulfilled life. Carrie doesn't know what this means. She is a caretaker. Her life for thirty years had been to take care of her husband and children. It had become her entire identity and personality. She nevertheless wants to be happy again, and doesn't want her children to worry, so she listens to their concerns and takes some time to think about what they have said.

Eventually, some anger begins to surface. Carrie is mad that her husband has been cared for so well and has disrespected her. She is mad that she has spent a year thinking about him. Meanwhile, the divorce is almost finalized, and her husband already has his next wedding planned. Her narrative is now: *I have lived for other people for most of my life, and it is time to learn how to live for myself.*

Carrie sits down and writes a list of all of the things she has always wanted to do but couldn't because she was taking care of her husband and children. She had been a good student in school but left when she became pregnant. She decides to enroll in college. This gives her the identity of student and scholar. She has always wanted to read the classics but spent her time reading chapter books to her children. She goes to the library and picks out some Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. This gives her the identity of an intelligent reader. She has always wanted to fulfill her creative desires but has spent her time attending functions at her children's schools and husband's workplace. She finds a local artist to give her lessons in painting. This gives her the identity of an artist.

Throughout the process of adding each of these activities to her life, Carrie is shaping her personality. This development had been stunted when she became a wife and a mother, and she now finds that she can transform her traits and become more well-rounded. In the terminology of the Big 5 traits, she has become slightly more extroverted (coming out of her shell), more open to new ideas, perhaps less agreeable (in the sense of willingness to comply with the demands of others), and more emotionally stable.

Her narrative is now: Other people are important to me, but I live firstly for my happiness and wellbeing. If something is not working in my life, I am able to stand tall and transform in order to not only survive but to achieve a better life.

Carrie was able to realize that the sentiments of altruism must fit into a broader narrative of who we ourselves are (and what we ourselves need), otherwise our duties to others become oppression of self: role incompatibility or role conflict. We end up wallowing in self-pity and resentment, which is just as dysfunctional as embracing the world with a grandiose sense of personal entitlement.

So, how do we know if we have a resilient narrative or a dysfunctional one? Resilient narratives follow tragedy with role adjustments, not victimhood. The best indication that your claims of victimhood have exceeded the bounds of rationality is the development of an elaborate conspiracy theory, explaining every problem as part of all-powerful forces who have it in for you. Such a narrative props up sagging self-esteem ("I must be pretty important for all those forces of evil to conspire against me") and justifies personal failures ("It's not my fault, *they* are to blame"). At some point, this may enter the realm of mental disorder.

Mental Disorders

Dysfunctional narratives can trigger or sustain a full-blown, clinically significant mental disorder.

Epidemiology is the study of how widespread diseases become. Nearly one in five U.S. adults currently suffers from a clinically significant mental illness. If we move from current incidence to lifetime prevalence, about half of U.S. families will have to cope with someone becoming mentally ill.

The most commonly diagnosed disorder, for every age category, is some form of depression (with anxiety close behind, depending upon the criteria).

Etiology is the study of the origin of diseases: the causal nexus bringing about a syndrome. While there are a few disorders that follow clearly an identified genetic cause (e.g., Huntington's) and a few that can be traced to a specific experience in a person's life (e.g., Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), most mental disorders involve a complex interaction between genetics, intrauterine environment, early childhood experiences, social norms, established personality traits, and current stressors. Different disorders may

have different components in different causal roles. Bipolar disorder may be more genetic, while schizophrenia may also include some other prenatal factors. Even two different individuals suffering from the same disorder (e.g., depression), might have different adverse conditions in childhood, or different proportionate importance of those experiences. Mental health professionals, representing different theoretical schools, may disagree about the relative impact of childhood trauma and current stress.

One way of conceptualizing the role of the different causes is to identify the four roles of causes.

four P's of etiology

Perpetuating

Predisposing

Principal

Precipitating ⟶ Disorder
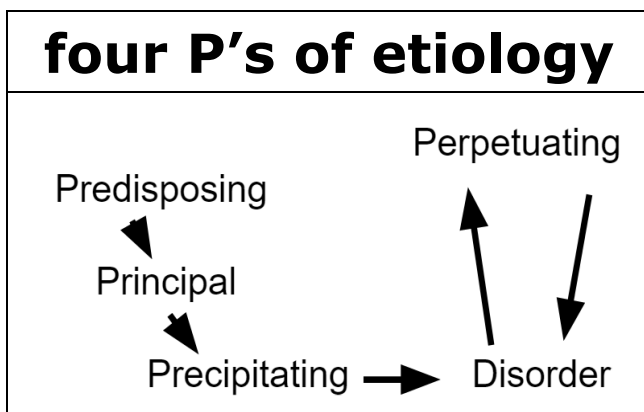
Chronologically, the first to arise is the *predisposing* cause, frequently in the form of genetics, intrauterine environment, or adverse early childhood experiences. Just before the onset of a mental breakdown, we can usually identify a trigger, usually in the form of a recent traumatic event or ongoing stress in the current environment. Think of this *precipitating* cause as the spark that ignited the dynamite that had been stored up by the predisposing cause. After the onset, there are changed behaviors and situations that can keep the problem going, or even worsen it. This reinforcing, or *perpetuating*, cause is the central dynamic of many mental disorders. On the other hand, the individual might have enough wisdom and willpower to be more resilient. Some people are also privileged with very supportive families and communities that model and facilitate healthy behavior. We call these causes *protective* factors, and they can prevent or shorten the episodes of mental disorders.

We use the term *principal* cause to refer to the essential or most important of these causes. Which particular cause would qualify might vary according to the specific disorder. It also varies according to the theoretical framework of the psychologist. Neuroscientists tend to emphasize heredity and intrauterine environments. Psychoanalysts emphasize early childhood. Behaviorists emphasize learned responses from the entire lifespan. The Cognitive and Positive schools of psychology emphasize narratives.

Cause	Role in mental disorder
predisposing	makes disorder more likely
principal	the essential cause
precipitating	the trigger
perpetuating	keeps the disorder going
protective	makes disorder less likely

Let's take a deeper look at depression and see how we could identify its specific causal components. In many cases of depression, we can note a family history (usually a parent who also had severe bouts of the blues). This probably indicates some genetic component, which would fit as a *predisposing* cause. Unlike some other mood disorders (e.g., bipolar) there seems to be less of a hereditary component for unipolar depression, so just because your mother had serious depression does not mean that it will prove a similar drag on your life, though there are some psychologists who would argue that genetics are the main factor (*principal* cause) in at least some cases of depression.

Another predisposing factor would be adverse childhood experiences, especially the loss of a parent through death or abandonment. Many child psychologists of a psychodynamic orientation consider such loss to be the principal cause of adult depression.

Recent losses and other current stresses would be the *precipitating* causes, the recent events triggering a full-blown depression. Typically, these begin as grief reactions to a loss such as the death of a loved one. Other triggering events might be the loss of employment, being passed over for a promotion, divorce, or deteriorating relations with one's children. Normal bereavement takes several weeks or even months. If things persist or worsen, a clinically relevant depression might be diagnosed, and should be treated as

such. Most patients themselves would rate such recent losses as the principal causes of their depression.

A more realistic, societal, view of depression may be that it has become almost normal (or at least quite common) given the steady loss of meaningful work, neighborhood relations, and stable nuclear families (Seligman, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Murray, 2012; Case & Deaton, 2020). These deteriorating interpersonal links can be viewed as a predisposing cause for the rise in the number of cases of depression. Alternatively, we can see that the previous, nurturing social structure and nuclear family was a *protective* factor, making it less likely for such privileged individuals to fall into the depression that those with hard luck are more susceptible to.
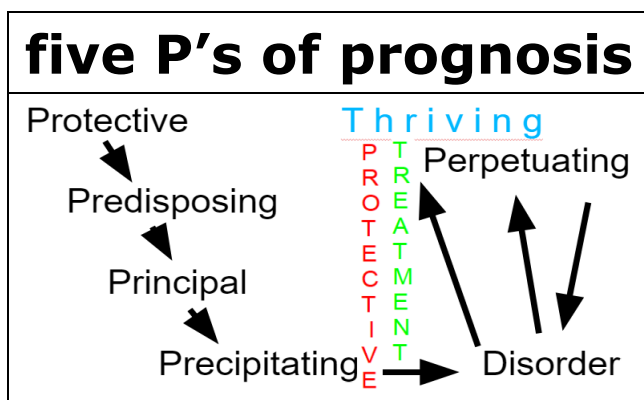
The cognitive approach to depression (e.g., Beck, 1967; Seligman, 1975; Ellis, 2004) views the principal cause of depression as being the "interpretive style" of the individual: the core beliefs about self, others, and the future. These helpless and hopeless ruminations include:

- "I never do a good job"
- "It is impossible for me to have a good life"
- "Things will never get better for me"

After treating hundreds of depressed elders, I (TLB) have concluded that we can rarely successfully revisit mid-life losses, let alone excavate the childhood traumas. Most of the easy fixes with geriatric patients involve processing recent losses (e.g., retirement, widowhood, loss of friends, forced

relocations, physical declines, dementia onset, caregiving responsibilities). The greatest point of leverage in treatment is often dealing with the perpetuating causes - those beliefs and even life situations which facilitate recovery (or preclude recovery in their absence).

So where do narratives come in? We could say that narratives are closely related to the core beliefs identified by Beck, but it might be better to say that the narratives are the life stories that the patient develops in psychotherapy. These are protective and help prevent a bereaved individual from falling into a depression, and for helping the depressed individual deal with the perpetuating causes.

By contrast, there are some dead-end narratives that provide a firm foundation for the perpetuating causes of depression.

Naomi grew up in a middle-class family in Chicago back in the 1950s. She had one brother, a year younger. Her mother always bragged, "Once I had the boy, I convinced my husband to get snipped, and I never had to worry about getting pregnant again. Just think, I might have had another girl." Naomi always felt like she was unappreciated, a burden to her mother. Her brother excelled in school and went on to earn a degree in optometry, making the mother proud of her doctor son. Naomi had some kind of undiagnosed learning disability, but her mother framed it as, "At least the boy got all of the smarts," suggesting that intelligence would have been wasted on Naomi.

The only times that her mother lavished affection on Naomi was when she came home from school crying due to failing an exam or being bullied by more attractive girls. Naomi learned that the key to attention and affection is to fail. In high school Naomi took secretarial courses and got a job at an insurance company. When her mother asked what her day at work had been like, and Naomi said it had been fine, or even started to recount a minor accomplishment, her mother would shift the conversation to herself (or the boy). But if Naomi talked about how hard or unrewarding her job was, her mother was consoling.

Naomi eventually married a co-worker, a man who did a clerical job no more prestigious than her own. Over their long marriage, he tried a couple of small business opportunities, and both failed due to his lack of acumen. Again, the same pattern of maternal relations could be seen - when Naomi lamented about her lot in life, she got attention and consolation from her mother.

The dysfunctional narrative developed by Naomi was, "I should not try to achieve things, but just admit what a loser I am and at least I'll be accepted." This is not just a predisposing cause of chronic low-grade depression, but a real perpetuating cause when some life event triggers a serious depression.

Treatment

Psychotherapy is the investigation and revision of narratives. Psychotherapy has been a main aspect of treatment for mental disorders for nearly a century and a half. Everyone has a story to tell, a narrative. Some people doubt that their story is of interest to anyone else, and therefore keep it to themselves. Unfortunately, some people also keep their narratives from themselves. The role of the therapist is to help people recognize (and transform) their own narratives. The task of psychotherapy is to mentor the patient in developing the capacity for willpower consistent with its use in a socially acceptable context, rather than a merely narcissistic one.

The standard treatment for depression is a combination of antidepressant medication plus psychotherapy. There are dozens of effective medications in the (older) classes of monoamine oxidase inhibitors, MAOIs, and tricyclic compounds, TCAs, as well as the (newer) classes of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, SSRIs, and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, SNRIs. These medications differ greatly in terms of the pattern of side effects and contraindications, but most will prove effective for two-thirds of the patients within six weeks (assuming that the patient takes the medication daily, as directed). Many psychiatrists in private practice are convinced that the greatest single factor in why antidepressant medication is not more effective is because the patients do not comply with the prescribed regimen.

One type of individual who does not benefit from treatment is the *avoider*. Lola, now 35, has been married for nearly a decade. Her husband is essentially kind, and quite successful, a good breadwinner and father to their rambunctious two-year-old son. Lola chose the college major that she loved but was unable to translate it into a real career, so she was eager to be the stay-at-home parent. She managed to avoid postpartum depression, but the feisty toddler is burning her out. Putting their son in daycare to give Lola

more "me time" has enabled her to get into yoga and her favorite art projects, but it has not made a dent in the low mood.

At the urging of her husband, she consulted her OBGYN and received a prescription for an SSRI, sertraline (Zoloft). She tried it for a week, but felt more tired, and had poorer quality sleep. These side effects are not uncommon in the first week, though they usually disappear over the next couple of weeks. Lola just stopped taking the medication and did not mention this to her physician or husband. The only person Lola mentioned this to was her closest friend, who had a similar experience and decision. So, their mutually supportive talk sounds like this:

- "It's not a natural way. I'll stick with yoga."
- "I should beat this thing on my own."
- "I quit because I didn't want to get addicted."

Lola (and her friend) have a real misunderstanding of the role of antidepressant medication. It is not something that is truly addictive like an opioid or benzodiazepine. It is not something that precludes yoga or exercise or even psychotherapy.

The worst thing about Lola's evolving anti-antidepressant narrative is that it misunderstands the role of willpower. When she says that she *should* be able to beat it on her own, she is lamenting her lack of willpower. Focusing on that shortcoming will only intensify her low self-image and frustration with her inability to get out of the depression.

The other half of the standard first-line treatment for depression is psychotherapy. Although there are several approaches which work (e.g., Freudian, Rogerian) most of the evidence shows a superior effectiveness for cognitive-behavioral therapy, CBT (Beck & Alford, 2009).

Compared to Lola, Denise represents a different kind of therapy avoider. She readily accepts the need for medication but has not followed through with the psychotherapy. Denise thinks she is too busy and already has her "head screwed on straight." So, she has not even called for an appointment to begin the ten free CBT treatments that she gets through her HMO plan. Denise's SSRI prescription for fluoxetine (Prozac) did seem to lift her spirits, but at about the year and a half mark, the depression was seeping back. Antidepressant medications are usually quicker than therapy in gaining remission of symptoms, but prevention of relapse is largely a matter of developing a more resilient narrative (and that is where CBT can help).

Denise's lack of the underlying narrative work remains as an ongoing predisposing cause of depression. When the next stressor triggered a bereavement reaction, her body was just too adjusted to the fluoxetine to prevent her from falling back into a depression.

Perhaps the most unfortunate patient response to depression is to completely reject the science-based combined treatment of medication plus psychotherapy in favor of some kind of pseudoscience quackery.

Carla was the timid daughter of a wealthy family. She developed a clinically significant depression during the spring semester at a second-tier liberal arts college a thousand miles away from home. Convinced that the problem was with the college and not her (there may have been some incompatibility) Carla decided to join an old high school friend who had moved to Chicago. The two girls tried to find some fulfilling employment at the Art Institute but that did not pan out. After a few weeks of job interviews that went nowhere, Carla was walking down Lincoln Avenue and saw a sign saying, "Take the most accurate and reliable personality test, free." Carla couldn't resist. The helpful attendant quickly scored the "Oxford" test and told Carla about her weaknesses but was assured that they could be fixed through the right training. She was given a book called *Dianetics*. She attended a number of lectures and learned how her problems could be solved by paying for a process known as "auditing" with a gadget known as e-meter. Carla discovered some years later that the test wasn't "the most accurate and reliable" and the whole commitment was far from being free (either in cost or her own liberty).

Marlene represents another dysfunctional approach to psychotherapy: the *addict*. Rather than seek out and embrace the transformative power of psychotherapy, she has found within her therapist's "unconditional positive regard" the nurturing relationship she never received from her parents. She has been with her current therapist for three years, and prior to that, she was with several previous therapists for more than six months each. She keeps saying in each session how rough her life is, but she is "getting better" (because those words get a warm and fuzzy response from her therapist, every time).

Marlene just can't make progress on her recovery because she is waiting for an apology from the world, or at least from her:

- father (deceased), who was too remote
- mother, who had the same chronic low-grade depression

- ex-husband, who got tired of her anger and whining
- kids, who got tired of her whining about their father
- friends, who got tired of her whining about her kids
- previous therapists, who showed inadequate supportiveness for her whining about everything

The narrative of this therapy addict is, "I'm a victim and entitled to your sympathy. If I don't get enough sympathy from you, that makes me more of a victim, and more entitled to sympathy." So, this dead-end narrative is powerfully self-sustaining. When the therapist bestows sympathy, she succeeds in getting what she craves; when the therapist does not bestow sufficient sympathy that just proves that she is the victim and deserves sympathy.

Marlene and her type of therapy addicts do deserve and need an apology, but not from the world. She needs an apology from herself to herself. It was her failure to develop a healthy narrative that keeps her stuck in her victimhood.

Psychotherapy can be an effective treatment for most patients. It can be effective in reversing some disorders, or at least in securing remission of symptoms, depending upon the diagnosis and the patient. Psychotherapy works because if dead-end myths and thoughts cause depression and anxiety, then healthy narratives can prevent or overcome these conditions.

Effective psychotherapy must do more than demonstrate that the patient's current narrative is dysfunctional, but assist the patient in creating a new, healthier narrative. In a dysfunctional narrative, you find yourself excusing your own behavior by rationalizing how it was *pushed* by your past (for which you are not responsible). In a healthy narrative, your behavior is *pulled* by a vision of a future aspiration for which you strive. That narrative connects your values and your present strivings. The better the narrative achieves this, the healthier it is. It may not be possible to change the past, but a new narrative can change our memory of it, and how that impacts us now (Hardy, 2020). Changing your narrative is not about forcibly forgetting the past, but about changing the interpretation of that memory. Wisdom is not having established a past free from the blemish of mistakes. If we can learn from past mistakes and call on our willpower not to perpetuate those mistakes, then we have a path to the good life.

The success of an individual is largely dependent upon the ability to develop willpower in such a way that deficits in personality traits (e.g.,

extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, emotional stability) can be compensated for, and the individual can socially present a self that appears to have more acceptable levels of these traits. In other words, the individual must be prepared to fake it if he cannot make it; otherwise, he is a social loser.

Even willpower can be used to maintain a dead-end narrative. This happens when one is stubborn, and willpower is used to simply oppose others rather than to oppose one's own lower desires and temptations. This is a common tactic in geriatric patients who refuse to comply with the therapist's suggestions (or medication) just to show how independent and strong-willed they are. There is no merit in being stubborn, and no flourishing in stubbornly defending a dead-end narrative.

Rogerian therapy works by mitigating the internalized narrative of the overly critical parent. Freudian therapy works by strengthening the ego (at the expense of both the superego and the id). So, when seeking out a therapist, find one who will have the patience to help you in your journey toward wisdom and willpower, but is not overly sympathetic to your victimhood. If your therapist, from whatever school, denies your individual responsibility for changing your narrative, real progress will not be made (Dalrymple, 2015).

Does your narrative clarify and facilitate your attainment of your goals and the fulfillment of your potential? To acknowledge that one has experienced past injustices may be a steppingstone, but to relish that in status of victimhood becomes a stumbling block.

One vulnerability of Rogerian and Freudian approaches is a focus on early childhood. The first narratives we create in childhood are those which help us survive the disappointments, traumas, and tribulations of our early years. But not all of these primal narratives are functional for an adult world, and psychotherapy must alter or remove them. Some life questions are more important to answer. It is less important to ask, "Where did I come from" than "Where do I choose to go" and "How can I get there"? In our life's journey, we should spend most of our time looking through the windshield than the rearview mirror. Having known many effective therapists trained in Rogerian or Freudian techniques, I would say that this vulnerability can be overcome. A healthy narrative would be consistent with Freud's concept of an adaptive ego capable of preventing both the impulsiveness of the id and the harshness of the superego (both of which can threaten emotional stability).

The great attraction of dream analysis for psychotherapy is that dreams can inspire us to consider other narratives. As Jung has pointed out, dreams (at the deeper level) are archetypal and correspond to inspiring mythology. Freud and Adler understood a more common function of dreams - to express the individual dreamer's current frustration with current narratives - but it was Jung who understood the role of dreams to inspire a more creative future narrative by getting beyond the patient's stubborn defenses against insight. A healthy narrative would be consistent with Jung's concept of individuation - the ego gets a regular supply of energy from the collective unconscious and avoids repression of the shadow and anima.

The perspectives on mental illness offered by the so-called neuroscience and evolutionary schools have not developed a firm foundation for psychotherapy, perhaps because they don't have a real understanding of the role of narratives. Narratives are not predetermined in the DNA of the zygote. Narratives are not born. A unique narrative maker (a human being) is born. Narratives are created by that unique human (guided by cultural forms such as religion, art, family, workplace, marketplace, and politics). Narratives don't have to be permanent, unless our creativity runs out.

Indeed, these evolutionary and neuroscience schools tend to go so far as to question free will, dismissing it as a delusion. Clinicians regard delusions as false beliefs that have dysfunctional consequences. Most mental disorders are built on delusions. The schizophrenic has delusions of grandeur. Depressed patients have delusions of hopelessness and helplessness. Anxiety and phobic patients have delusions of danger. Hypochondriacs have delusions of physical illness. Paranoids have delusions of persecution.

The worst thing we could do for a depressed patient is to talk him out of a belief in (or commitment to) his own agency. "I'd like to help you with your bipolar, but you lost the genetic lottery, and there is no cure. You cannot will it away." What the patient needs to hear is something like this: "You have special challenges due to your unique heredity and environment. Living a better life is possible, but it will require your *commitment* to work with the treatment team, stay on your medication, and show up for therapy sessions."

Family Therapy

Because we live through social roles (child, spouse, parent, career, consumer) we are invariably in relationships with others. Most adult stresses are due to problems in roles (conflict, incompatibility, timing, rapid transition, overload, underload). The most important of these roles involve our relationship with our family, and there are times in life when family therapy is the most important approach to treatment.

As with individual psychotherapy, the key to understanding our suffering, and the key to flourishing lies within our narratives. We must identify what is dysfunctional and create what will bear fruitful relationships.

Family problems frequently boil down to different expectations and different values. You do not have to apologize for your values, preferences, or priorities. You only have to apologize to *yourself* when it is your own behavior that is inconsistent with your own priorities. You only have to apologize to others for your *behavior* when it is that behavior that adversely impacts their pursuit of their values.

If your view of love is only that of a powerful and joyous sentiment, it will disappoint you because it is fleeting. You need a narrative that views love as a commitment. As Jordan Peterson says, "Responsibility is what gives life meaning." When you are part of a family, you are committing yourself to others, and their pursuit of their values. If you are unwilling to do that, maybe marriage and children should not be in your future.

Before you create a family, answer yourself this question: will I commit to this new series of roles?

The maintenance of mental health is the refusal to listen to the voice of the inner victim. That voice views the essential roles of son, father, husband, worker, and religious follower as the roles of slavery, conveying obligations without relevance other than victimhood.

It is rare that a marriage is a joint narrative accepted by both spouses. Most marriages are a confluence or confrontation of two different narratives. Unfortunately, sometimes this is a competition or conflict or collision between narratives. A good marriage does not require a singular common narrative, but involves mutual cooperation and nurturing of these separate narratives, with perhaps a large overlap of conjoint narratives. The bare minimum is that these narratives be compatible.

If your current narrative's main function is to excuse your own bad behavior in your own mind, don't assume that other people (even family

members) will find it convincing in excusing your bad behavior. A better approach in communicating with others is to listen to their goals and see how those can be furthered without jeopardizing one's own.

Decisions

If we define mental health counseling broadly (i.e., individual psychotherapy, family counseling, self-help groups, pastoral care), then it would include most Americans, at some point in their lives. Few people are in counseling for a major part of their lives. That means that, on a daily basis, most of the decisions you make are not going to receive input from a professional. These are decisions you make on your own (perhaps with input from friends and family).

Whether the decision comes in a yes/no format, or in a choice between a range of options, all decisions reflect your current narratives, and if they are wise decisions, they will serve your most important goals.

There are some algorithms for maximizing gain on those decisions that can be reduced to a quantifiable goal. In most cases, we only have this heuristic: the wisest choices we make today between present options are the choices that preserve better future options.

That particular best decision may vary by age, but is not determined by a specific age that the person happens to be in, such that we could say something like:

- All 20 year olds should always …
- All 40 year olds should always …
- All 60 year olds should always …

All decisions need to be according to the context of the individual decision maker, and age itself is never the most important contextual factor of the decision maker, especially compared to the unique interaction of the life roles experienced by the individual.

If we are looking for a decision-making guideline applicable at any age, it would be: *Choose that option for which you are most likely to have the least regret ten years from now.*

Your narrative must sustain your wisdom. Without wisdom there is no enduring happiness, only the momentary experience of pleasure. Such pleasure does not persist in memory, nor does it build admirable anticipation.

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NARRATIVES

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