

Who Fired Prometheus? Pt. 5. Our Lost Heart of Light—The Deconstruction and Repair of Modern Personality by Rich Norman

Last summer the process euphemistically known as "renewable resource management" was in its final phase, and the helicopter came in low for a nearly perfect pass, spraying poison in a smooth carpet over the denuded hillside, earth now packed hard as black and brown concrete, crushed and scraped clean from the heavy equipment used to "harvest" the timber, then burned, and now, sprayed with poison. The once living and beautiful land now a wound, and I can hardly look upon it. The people who do this harm, are good people, and skilled workers. Something is missing, something has become cut off... dissociated. A piece of our human puzzle, which once dislodged, leaves us thinking exploitation is a right, and harm, a human privilege and pleasure. I believe I have found it, found the element which is part of each of us, and, in its influence has formed many higher notions and ideas throughout the diversity of historical and spiritual tradition. Likewise, its dissociation leads down another pathway. I will share a piece of psychology I have recently discovered, a bit of psychology which is responsible for what the pretense and paradoxical murk of eastern thought has called "enlightenment," and I will simply call health, and balance. So from whence come optimism, connection, empathy, caring, kindness, health and happiness in our view of the world as a pleasure, a glowing and healthy part of ourselves, rather than a thing to hurt and exploit to carelessly fill our empty need? Is there an alternative to the dissociated moral structure which has us do "what we must," and in this act of moral obedience, to find ourselves unfeeling, obedient, and so... immoral? Is there a truly ethical alternative to the modern moral dilemma, our "conscience," this phylogenetic relic of a barbarous patriarch, this masochism which has us all becoming less and less intelligent, less and less ethical, less and less healthy and productive, this masochism which is choking us dry, leaving the worthy with a single question on our lips: is there "a-moral" here? Indeed there is! And within it, an answer to the question, "Who Fired Prometheus?"

This is the fifth and final in a series of articles outlining the development and impact of super-ego on the dynamic of modern personality. Please read the previous four essays in this series in order to comprehend this solution, to what is a severe and disturbing problem and degradation inherent to the construction of modern personality. The previous articles are:

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-part-1-our-barbaric-mystery.html>

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-pt-2-analysis-the-archetypal-mutilationour-masochistic-inheritance.html>

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-pt-3-the-historical-nexus-our-fearful-phylogenetic-ethic-and-its-origins.html>

<http://blog.theultranet.com/2013/06/who-fired-prometheus-pt-4-economic-analysis-the-ontology-of-submissionthe-formative-mechanisms-of-su.html>

There is a little known psychologist named Wilfred Bion, who in the most mistaken and painful philosophical tradition, insists on using obscure language to describe simple concepts. His most brilliant and profound idea is the notion of "alpha function." Although assigned a seemingly arbitrary Greek alphanumeric designation, we can gain a clue as to the foundational importance of this idea from the fact that alpha is the very first letter of the Greek alphabet. In turn, alpha function is the foundation upon which much of the evolution of healthy personality is based. As the child grows, he is entirely dependent upon the mother, and the mother is all but literally, his whole world. Her face, fills his vision to become his world, and she looks upon him and sees his needs and moods, and in turn, her face responds and she answers, anticipates, looks and provides, and so a circuit, a round is formed, a circle between the child's world, his mother's face and her action, and himself. *In this, the boundaries between the child's external world and his internal self blur, and a connection is formed between the world, and the child, whereby the child's impression is one of the world being a loving extension of one's self, a responsive and integrated extension of his internal world, both nurturing and caring, and, indivisible from himself.* It has been demonstrated that these early interactions are fundamental and foundational for social development, and encourage neuro-endocrine changes resulting in deep innervations connecting the limbic and the orbitofrontal and other areas of the brain, initiating the maturation of the dopaminergic "sympathetic ventral tegmental limbic" circuit, and also, the noradrenergic "parasympathetic lateral limbic" circuit, which act in tandem to opposite effects (Schore, as cited in Kaplan-Solms & Solms, 2002, pp. 234-235, 237).

I propose that this series of circuits in the brain, in their development or lack thereof, correspond to the potential empathetic capacities of the individual. In the affective dynamic of these two circuits we see the essence of ethical development, which is not borne upon the back of threat, *which is a dissociative factor*, but is created here, in the structures which are responsible for empathetic dynamism: The sympathetic circuit allowing what is surely a reward of pleasure and libido as self is experienced integrated into the world, this circuit using a dopaminergic neuromodulator, and the parasympathetic circuit which uses noradrenergic neuro-modulation, a response to shut off our pleasure as a feedback mechanism sensitive to social conditions of rebuke and reproach (shame). Between the two circuits, we see the orbitofrontal cortex connected to the limbic system, the OFC operating in its familiar role as a mediator of social cues and response. In this dynamic opposition we may even see, on the most fundamental level, the functions of libido and repression—*anxiety serving its psychoanalytic role as a repressive agent, brought on by an increase in noradrenergic modulation of the "parasympathetic lateral limbic" circuit to repress our pleasurable drives, when they conflict with the feedback we receive from the world and others.* These two circuits working in tandem are the neural substrate upon which empathy, and so, ethical conduct and sentiment are founded.

There is considerable support for this idea within current neuroscience. This support comes from two avenues: 1. Studies of people with brain lesions and damage to the orbitofrontal areas, and, 2. Studies on "Antisocial Personality Disorder," or APD.

Studies detailing the physiological changes and characteristics endemic to APD, a condition estimated to affect 65 to 80 percent of the prison population (Gazzaniga, et al., 2009, p. 629), indicate a volumetric reduction in the prefrontal grey matter, and reduced glucose metabolism in the orbitofrontal cortex of the subjects as revealed in PET (Raine, 2002). This condition is demonstrated by Raine, to be a product of not only genetic, but also environmental factors. In studies involving patients with damage to the orbitofrontal cortex, the patient is unable to properly monitor and assess the responses of others, and so, the patient with OFC damage will believe they have done well, and be quite proud of their interactions in social situations, even though those interactions were inappropriate (Beer, et al., 2006; Gazzaniga, et al., 2009, p.605). Ergo: The proper development and function of the neural circuitry connecting the emotional (limbic), and orbitofrontal regions, and those prefrontal regions themselves which are volumetrically altered as a function of environmental and genetic factors, are crucial for proper affective functioning and reality testing. Plainly: If the "alpha function" circuitry is faulty, and the OFC is not doing its job, ethical development and social function are impaired.

This allows a specific neurological/psychological prediction: In those cases where a reliable personality inventory or other trustworthy test indicates the heightened presence of Empathy as a fundamental constituent of personality, a positive correlation will be demonstrated between the character trait of Empathy, and the robust innervations and demonstrable structural development and functional activity of both the dopaminergic "sympathetic ventral tegmental limbic" circuit, and also, the noradrenergic "parasympathetic lateral limbic" circuit.

Now we must remember that all of our experience of the world is subjective, colored and defined not by the particular experience itself, but in how we interpret that experience or perception. Think of how one person will find beauty in a desolate desert landscape, and another, an empty and barren view most uninviting. Perhaps here, we have found a non-genetic developmental clue as to the mystery of optimism and pessimism, the expectation that the world will or will not be a welcoming place, whether it will be responsive to our needs, or cold and refusing of them. Here we may have a piece of the puzzle shrouding the source of ethics and morality as well, for throughout history laws and rules, many most pungent and barbaric, have attempted to enforce and create ethical sentiment and behavior as a function of external threat, to poor result. Think of the Twelve Tables of Rome, with its code of mutilation, so deeply symbolic of castration and the threat of the father, casually proclaiming how much a creditor may cut from the debtor's body: "si plus minusve secuerunt, ne fraude esto" [If they have secured more or less, let that be no crime] (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 64), or our own capitol punishment—both so deeply ineffective! It seems that ethical sentiment and behavior are not born under threat, but instead the entire of ethical law is but manifestation of a single simple principle: Empathy. Perhaps we have found the source of empathetic feeling and hence, ethical action as well, might both be born in this golden moment, here where the world is the self and the self the world, and so, we can dispense with any external "golden rule" or "categorical imperative" proclaiming our actions must be reducible to a moral maxim, or equal to what we ourselves would desire. How could one desire to hurt or exploit the world, once connected to, and inseparable from it? How could one consider such a thing,

to harm the world is to harm ourselves! The canon of ethics: threat and rule are ineffective because the truth which foster them is no longer available to *feel*. It is clear that morality and ethical conduct are not a function of threat, but of internal security, healthy connection and balance...ethics are never created as a function of threat and rule, they are born from within. Ethics are a manifestation of health, a function of happiness. It is conscience itself, our modern "morality," super-ego itself, functioning as a masochistic, punitive and threatening agency which has caused the dissociation around which we have all become so deeply unethical, so very..."moral." Empathy is ethical, and so—Empathy is amoral. Our modern ethic is an ethic of obedience, an internal structure crystalized around the threat of castration, forming an immoral, and deeply unhealthy dissociation.

I believe this dissociation can be repaired, and that the source impressions of "alpha function" can be used in a new way to accomplish this end. (Of course, in those cases where alpha function itself is lacking or underdeveloped, the model of "the intersubjective processes" is a better therapeutic choice, and this method is ill advised). As you will recall, in part four of this series we have seen how super-ego can be disbanded, weakened, and in fact, permanently removed. To accomplish this, one exposes super-ego to the formative repressions around which it has been created. This process is too involved to specify within the limits of this forum, but those who wish to pursue the topic can contact me directly, at: rich@richnorman.com, so as to be put on a waiting list for the book, and journal, which will contain this sensitive information. Once these formative impressions have been brought to consciousness, a very great deal of repressed libido will become available, reversing to some extent, the process of infantile amnesia, and, altering entirely, the modern structure of personality. Neurosis itself can be removed, super-ego can have its economic effects on our happiness and intelligence reversed, and this modern crippling of the soul—undone.

So the question lays before us, we who have this golden feeling, and have lost it: The psychologist would ask, "How might we repair the dissociation, and again define our world and perceptions through this distant memory?" This question is no easy thing to answer, and each case has had the strings cut in various places, one made distant from the memory, ruined by super-ego because they are "a Man," and men never accept, they never feel or accept love—or another is blocked from the memory because they have learned not to trust, and refuse the feeling because they feel vulnerable and afraid. Weakness always masquerades as strength. I can not help with this work, a battle which each must enjoin on their own. Unearthing the formative memories and impressions responsible for the structuring of the super-ego so as to create these unfortunate results, is a task which is beyond the scope of this discourse. I can however, point the way, and give you a hint, a splash, a scent of the imagining, so that you may find your way, and have this blessed thing alongside me. The memory of the formation of the sympathetic circuit, of this aspect of alpha function and empathy, will likely not be available to find, as its genesis stems from so early in development, but, its symbolic resonance is an easy thing to create. We can find this together, as a dream, a dream of a time, a time before our fall into "morality" and obedience:

Can you picture it? The sun pouring down upon your face, shining and warm, golden and loving is this light, a light you are folded into, and have created, shining, pouring back up into the arch of heaven, spilling from your glad face, and again down to fill you, the trees nodding as you dream them, the sky golden and warm as you have poured it—and back around—for it has dreamt you...now as the world, of the world, nourished and warmed, our circle complete, a circuit of golden warmth and light spilling the world into being and returning again, unto you, and again, you unto it...and all the world is eternal, safe, now and again nourished and nourishing, the earth and life, now and again, but a single warmth, a round, a circuit, a circle of happiness, pouring down and returning, warm and sweet, the world now glad and warm, complete, born out and eternal, the human circle glowing, as life spilled round into warmth—and golden light.

As a psychologist I must point out the potential therapeutic meaning: Here we see the end of neurosis and modern personality! Once super-ego has been disbanded and its pathogenic influence removed, we can replace it with an intentional invigoration of the source impressions of alpha function. The structure of the sympathetic alpha function source impressions are both active and passive, the sun pouring down upon one, the mother looking, and you returning this gaze, the sun poured back into heaven...both active and passive. This allows attachment points for many disturbing wishes and pieces of unconscious content, from passive wishes held under repression as a remainder from defensive processes during rape, or as general passive unconscious fantasy, or, sadistic wishes, both active and passive pathological content can have their energies released from fixation to power the image! The quantitative factor must be carefully attended. The more energetic contents must be brought up from under repression one by one, so as to remove most of the energy before the process can begin asymptotically, but, the less severe contents can be used to power the ideational structure, even without being consciously recognized! In this way, fixated unconscious content can be unbound from the cathexis which with it has been invested, and that energy used for healthy purposes. The source alpha function ideational structure may be seen analogously in this capacity to that of an oxygen scrubber on a spacecraft, which converts toxic gasses into usable oxygenated atmosphere. Here, the source alpha function impressions are analogously converting the cathexis invested in pathogenic fixated ideational content into unbound undifferentiated libido for use in any healthy capacity. The passive and active attachment points permit all sorts of fixated content to power the structure, and in so doing, reclaim the fixated libido for healthy use, while the economic disaster which is super-ego, the isometric self-extinction of our internalized masochism, has been extinguished by way of conscious exposure to the source impressions repressed in its formation. As the wealth of libido is reclaimed, much from the period of infantile amnesia, and much from later repressions, the system has been redefined as a more efficient and healthy structuralization of mental processes—both economically, and ethically.

Can you imagine?— Today the helicopter is prepped and loaded as before, filled with poison to spray upon the tender earth, and sicken her. But the pilot has changed, his mind and heart have again found a place within himself he had lost, but now, his glad heart is brimming over with warmth, and all his pain is free, now nourishing him and fueling the golden vision, this ancient place now alive within him, his ache and angry hurt now a

warmth, and a gratitude to fill him up and return to life. The helicopter rises, and once aloft the pilot looks down and sees the glad emerald forest, her feathered fingers of shade and light stirring the distant breeze seem to call to him, at once known and new, familiar, aged and tender are the new hues and shades of this forest, and her heart of love and light so gladly spilled out before him, fill him with caring and happiness. He looks and wonders of this place with new eyes: Perhaps he has created this land, created her in this instant...just to look, or she him? A funny thought, and now, he is over the drop site, the ugly brown and black tear in the land, and he can not do it. How can he drop a cloud of thick poison upon her? The thought is as an insult, a pain, a sad and mistaken insult to the very heart of every good and caring thing. No, he can not, he will not. Tomorrow he will find another job, and today, he will treasure the earth rather than sicken her. Yes, this is best. How splendid is the day! Her golden heart of love and heat spilling down upon him from the arching horizon, sparkling with new hope and life, and he slips the stick forward and glides smoothly along the hills, over the ridge of folded green shade and life, light and silver light spilling over the pools of liquid and earth below, shimmering and glad is this new day, a perfect day in a perfect world, new and sultry is this day—just as he has imagined her!

So I will again state: Ethics are never created as a function of threat and rule, they are born from within. Ethics are a manifestation of health, a function of happiness.

And I hope you will gladly agree, to have met him, and unmasked him, so very ill and obedient before his father, chained, just as he desires and wishes, chained in voluptuous abandon to his rock, that we must refuse Prometheus, and now may gladly ask, and answer the question aloud and in turn: Who Has Fired Prometheus?—And then, to proudly proclaim the result: *It was us.*

References:

Beer, J. S., et al., (2006). Orbitofrontal cortex and social behavior: Integrating self-monitoring and emotion-cognition interactions. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 18, 871-880.

Gazzaniga, M., et al., (2009). *Cognitive neuroscience: The biology of the mind.* London: Norton Press.

Kaplan-Solms & Solms, M. (2002). *Clinical studies in neuropsychanalysis.* London: Karnac Press.

Nietzsche, F. (trans.) Kaufmann, W., Hollingdale, R. J. (1989). *On the genealogy of morals, and, Ecce homo.* New York: Vintage Books.

Raine, A. (2002). Biosocial studies of antisocial and violent behavior in children and adults: A review. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 30, 311-326.

Oregon resident Rich Norman, is a writer and musician with degrees in philosophy and music. Known as "The Laughing Recluse," he is the author of books spanning philosophy, psychology, and novels, with topics ranging from psychoanalytic theory to existential philosophy, verse and fiction. All text in this column is printed with the permission of, and remains the sole property of, the author, Rich Norman. Contact: rich@richnorman.com