

FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

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The Strangest Liberation



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You'd think that something liberating would be almost purely positive, but that really isn't true. There are many times when liberation comes only after acknowledging something ugly or dark.

In this case, I'm going to ask you to accept that humans are built with problems – that we are born with them and that we may never get rid of them. I know that this doesn't sound at all positive or helpful, but it really does lead to liberation; to *powerful* liberation.

The truth is that we have been abused and enslaved largely because we haven't understood or accepted these conflicts of ours. (I'll explain below, of course.)

I further believe that if any significant percentage of humanity were ever to internalize this message, human life would be changed, positively and quite possibly permanently.

DUELING WITH DUALISM

There is an old set of philosophical and theological arguments called *dualism*, which revolve around the idea that man has two natures: one physical and bad, the other spiritual and good. You can even find apostles in the Bible wrestling with this problem, most famously in this passage from St. Paul's letter to the Romans (condensed):

I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh. I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I am captive to the law of sin which dwells in my body. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Because of passages like this one, people have often concluded that physical things are evil. The Gnostic religion went so far as to say that all spirit was created by a good god and that all matter was created by an evil, malicious god.

Dualist ideas are found in many places, for the simple reason that there is some truth to them.

The problem with dualist ideas is that people don't stop with the simple observation that the body and mind are different. Instead, they build them up into grand theories, focusing around evil and good.

For example, many people have taken thoughts like St. Paul's and extended them into theories of evil being necessary. Not wanting to feel half-evil, or wanting to justify their bad acts, or just wanting to sound smart, they say that evil is necessary - because we couldn't know goodness without having evil to compare it with. Or that we couldn't know light without darkness.

These ideas are false, of course – kindness can be recognized quite well in the absence of cruelty, for example – but people are often confused by words and patterns, and especially if they soothe an internal conflict.

So, let's start off by specifying how much dualism we will admit into this discussion:

1. *The body and the mind are built for somewhat different purposes.*
2. *There is nothing wrong or bad about either body or mind – they just serve different ends.*

And that is all.

Body is not evil, it is merely different. And that brings us to one of the most important points that we will cover in this issue: ***We make errors of judgment when we expect a body to act like a mind.***

In particular, we tend to falsely judge ourselves and to condemn ourselves, because we expect our bodies to act like minds.

Bodies are not minds. They serve different purposes. It is unfair and wrong of us to expect otherwise.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

So, if our minds and bodies serve different ends, who's in charge?

This question requires some fairly complex answers, so we won't go too far into it just now. But we can start with this: *Bodies should do body things and minds should do mind things.*

There are areas of conflict, of course, but, in the end, the mind is capable of learning to control objectionable body impulses. Effort and training may be required, but it can be done.

Furthermore, the mind is designed for knowledge and analysis, while the body isn't, so it is generally a good thing that the mind is able to exert control over the body.

But, this is not always true, and *shouldn't* be always true...

WHEN BODIES RULE

Even though it's generally good that our minds can control our bodies, the body can overcome the mind at times. Such occasions can be troubling to our minds, but they are very often necessary. Here are the two primary areas where this shows up:

Sex: When the reproductive imperative (raw sexual desire) drives us, our mental deliberations are pushed aside... and often to a very large extent. This is a problem for us, as it tends to get us into difficult situations with other humans and obligates us to things (babies!) that we might or might not have chosen. The truth of the matter, however, is that the human race would not have survived without this powerful impulse. And it remains necessary, regardless of the trouble it can cause us.

Survival: Our bodies are really good at keeping us alive at crucial moments. We have several types of survival instincts. Here are some examples: If a loud, dangerous noise erupts nearby, we begin running without a thought. We may involuntarily step away from grave dangers before realizing that they are present. In a life and death situation we may automatically act to save ourselves without considering anything else, including other people.

THE THIRD INSTINCT

To sex and survival, we must add a third instinct, which is fear. But we must also specify that fear operates differently than the first two.

Sex is clearly initiated by the body. Survival actions are likewise triggered by the body, and even though sensory information is involved, mental deliberations are not.

Fear, however, is triggered in the mind, and particularly by imagination.

In other words, fear can be triggered by either sensory inputs (seeing a bear running toward you), or by mental processes alone (imagining an angry bear ahead).

I think you can see from this why fear is such a common problem to us: it can be triggered in many ways, even by outsiders putting ideas into our minds.

Our survival instincts use fear as a kind of early warning system. Since the brain can imagine and project so very well, our survival mechanisms channel some brain outputs directly to the adrenal glands, which then affect the rest of the body and give us the usual bad feelings of fear.

Fear's body reaction can be useful, because it seizes our attention: fear grabs the mind and focuses it. The great problem with this arises when the thing we focus on is not worth the pain and disruption involved. A secondary problem is that the chemicals associated with fear damage and degrade our bodies.

However much difficulty we encounter from these three instincts, humanity could not have survived, and would not now survive, without them. Without them we would not be here, and our virtuous minds

would be a moot point – they wouldn't exist either.

The job that stands before us now is to manage these instincts, rather than letting them run wild, or letting others use them against us.

The solution to the mind/body problem is not to condemn and oppress one system or the other, but to oversee the two parts and to help them to work together, minimizing and accommodating conflicts when they arise.

Once we understand these inherent conflicts and deal with them sensibly and benevolently, we free ourselves from many things.

But... we are getting ahead of ourselves.

CREATING SELF-CONDEMNATION

If it weren't problematic enough that our bodies and minds run up against each other from time to time, their conflicts have been magnified immensely. For millennia, men have created and believed ideas that could have no other result than self-condemnation. The two great self-condemning ideas are these:

1. We accept in our minds that all sexual desire is wrong, unless it matches a socially-imposed ideal. Our bodies, however, don't care about the rules, and we feel unapproved sexual impulses all the same. It's hard enough (though important) to restrict our sexual *actions*, but if we also demand of ourselves to stop all *impulses*, we demand the impossible and have no choice but to condemn ourselves.
2. We are told by authorities that we should care more about others than ourselves. But our survival instincts are centered on self, and we are programmed to keep ourselves alive before anything else. So, when survival concerns arise, we are driven to act for ourselves, not for others. No matter how many social philosophies tell us that things done for self are bad, that is precisely what we will do first... and what we *should* do first. (Helping others *is* virtuous, but it is not always our first impulse, and doesn't need to be.) The “others before self” philosophy invariably causes us to condemn ourselves.

As we said at the beginning: *We err when we expect a body to act like a mind. It does not, cannot, and should not.*

These two ideas work to divide us against ourselves and to condemn ourselves as dangerous, unstable, and even evil. The truth, however, is merely that our bodies and minds sometimes want different things.

What has been utterly unappreciated during these conflicts, is that *our bodies protect us from our minds*. Minds change rapidly and erratically; bodies don't. Let's take the sexual impulse as an example:

The human body's sexual impulse has been exactly the same for hundreds of thousands of years. But the minds of men have been convinced in many conflicting directions in only the past few thousand years. A few examples:

- Currently, homosexual relations between adults and adolescents is considered a horror, but in ancient Greece it was often a respected path to manhood and success.
- The first Christian leaders nearly all had wives. Later, they were forbidden to marry.
- Polygamy is allowed by the Bible and was widely practiced in biblical times, including New

Testament times. Now, however, religious people are generally horrified by the concept.

- In the 19th century, groups of people were fully convinced that man-woman marriage was contrary to the will of God and needed to be abolished. (See FMP #16.) At the same time, the larger culture was condemning even the suggestion of sexual thought outside of traditional marriage.
- The introduction of the birth control pill in about 1960 immediately disrupted the sexual ideas of the previous generation. (See FMP #10.)

Reproduction is absolutely essential to the continuance of the human race, so the stable and reliable instincts of the body have been, in this area, far better for survival than the erratic opinions of the mind. But, again, we are not saying that the mind is bad – only that the body is better suited for certain things – like survival.

UNEQUAL BALANCES

If everything above were not enough, there is one more piece to this troubling puzzle, and it is a very old thing; so old and so universal that its genesis is not entirely clear. But it is something that you will recognize as soon as it is pointed out to you.

What I refer to is this:

We are irrationally biased toward judging ourselves as flawed, deficient or bad.

We may do good things ten times; perhaps we even feel good about them, but one screw-up will leave us feeling like we're back to zero or below zero. The ten good acts are cancelled by one bad act. Mere mathematics show us that this is an uneven judgment, but we feel it all the same.

One bad act should cancel one good act, and no more, leaving us with nine good acts to our credit. But this is not what happens inside of us – instead, we feel like we're back to zero.

You have experienced this many times, especially when interacting with some type of authority. For example:

- If you answer your school teacher's questions correctly, you get a bit of credit for it, but if you are wrong, you lose a great deal: you will be scowled at, disapproved, embarrassed and quite possibly laughed at.
- Religions often teach us that we have to be absolutely without flaw, or else we are unacceptable to God.
- You can do good things all day and never get noticed, but if you screw up once, you get pounced upon.

We have been conditioned to believe that one flaw cancels all or most of our virtues: the single error wipes all our good deeds from our minds and leaves us feeling guilty and ugly and worthless. This is clearly irrational and out of balance, but it *is* what we feel.

And once we assume that one flaw cancels many virtues, several more destructive beliefs tend to follow:

- We walk around thinking about what we are not, rather than what we are. Thoughts about our deficits are permanently cued-up and ready for use, while thoughts of our strengths must be

pulled out of storage in order to be used.

- We are driven to compare ourselves to others and to feel bad if they are in any way superior.
- We presume that our negative traits are permanent and cannot improve. We don't just lose once at something, we are a permanent *loser*. We accept this verdict easily, but we accept the fact that we are self-surpassing far less easily.
- When a new concept comes along, people scramble to find one possible flaw with it. They will then reject it entirely, because of that single flaw, no matter how many virtues it may have.
- We see corruption and entropy as all-powerful, and require perfection in order to be convinced otherwise.

None of these things are logical or reasonable, and yet we see them almost everywhere.

We have a problem.

RECAP

Let's take a moment here to recap what we've covered thus far. None of this is especially complex, but new ideas can be surprisingly hard to absorb.

So, thus far we have said that:

1. Bodies and minds operate differently. This is not bad, it is necessary.
2. Sexual *actions* can be managed, but sexual *impulses* are involuntary. They are also necessary for the continuance of the species.
3. Survival impulses are also necessary, even though they pay no attention to popular doctrines or the expectations of others.
4. Fear can usefully seize our attention at crucial moments, but since it can be triggered by mere imaginings, it is very easy to abuse.
5. We are irrationally biased toward judging ourselves as flawed, deficient or bad.

Now, before we go any further on problems, let's look at fixing the situation:

THE CURE IS SIMPLE

Simple is not the same as *easy*, of course, and while the cure to this set of problems *is* simple, you'll have to stay with it persistently in order to free yourself. But that really isn't too hard.

The first step in fixing this situation is simply to recognize it. Once we recognize our instincts surging, we can choose to accept them, to redirect or modify the impulses, to summon our will to resist, or simply to laugh at the absurd contrasts.

Your position regarding these conflicts is to act as observer and overseer. You have two different systems operating simultaneously inside of you. So what if they bump into each other from time to time? You are capable of adapting and correcting problems as they arise.

First, observe when reason is being overrun by impulse, then either re-assess your logic or work around your impulses. It's as simple as that.

By embracing our internal conflicts, we stop unfairly judging ourselves, and that matters, a lot.

Let's conclude this section with three statements:

- *Impulses are not intelligent. They do not compare, analyze and imagine – they simply act.*
- *Minds are intelligent, but they are wildly variable. It may be evidence of a benevolent creator that our bodies have been given the power to overrule our minds on critical issues.*
- *Once we stop unfairly condemning ourselves, we can expect to become considerably happier and to function better.*

There is much more to say on how we are routinely abused by the problems we've mentioned in this discussion, how they get started, and so on. But it is more important to discuss how we improve ourselves by fixing this set of problems. So, we'll leave an examination of our abuse for a future issue; if we fix the root problems, those abuses will fail soon enough anyway.

So, we've defined the problem and we've described the solution; now let's examine the benefits:

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GET OVER IT

Let's presume that you've done what is mentioned above: You've been paying attention to your conflicts, fixing what you can, changing your mind at times, and stopping your body from going too far when necessary. More importantly, you've refused to accept any more blame than can be logically justified and you are persisting in all of this.

We're all different, of course, and feel things somewhat differently, but below is a list of things that tend naturally to follow a persistent embrace and management of your conflicts. Don't expect all of these to be immediate, and don't expect to notice every one of them, but you can definitely expect to encounter many items from this list.

By doing the things mentioned above, *you are changing the way you interact with yourself*, which will cause your self-experience to change.

On top of that, all the common abuses of our conflicts (like fear-based advertising and political propaganda, and the abuse of our sexual instincts to manipulate our thoughts) will stop working as well as they did previously, and that will reduce the “garbage-in” factor that our minds currently have to deal with.

So, with all that said, here is what to expect:

- You'll probably begin to notice a non-specific improvement of how you feel about yourself. You are likely to say, “It isn't any one thing; I just feel better.”
- You'll be less often embarrassed and more comfortable saying, “I don't know,” and even, “I was wrong.”
- You'll start seeing the stupid actions of others as management failures rather than evil deeds. You will condemn them less in your thoughts, which will make them less defensive, and will make you far more effective when trying to resolve your differences with them.
- You will shift toward living in ways that suit *you*, rather than laboring to achieve a “position” or to emulate people with high positions.
- You will begin to accept credit for the good things you do, and eventually to enjoy it.
- You will feel less of a need for status, and may come to view status as juvenile.

- You will begin to enjoy things more deeply, and will often prefer satisfaction to happiness.
- Creativity will come easier to you.
- You will tend to look for and fix root problems, rather than scrambling to make your actions look good for the sake of critical outsiders.
- You'll stop neurotically grasping at safety and stability in your relationships, and will pay more attention to building them, slowly and solidly.
- Your stress level will decline, leading naturally to an improved diet and lifestyle.
- You'll care a lot less about voices of authority, their grandiose pronouncements and their demands.
- You will tend to regard (or disregard) people because of their virtues, not because of their positions.
- You'll feel more comfortable taking risks.
- You will be more willing to accept pain and difficulties when they are required. (Because your pain level from internal conflicts will have declined.)
- You'll feel a lot less vulnerable when standing alone.
- You'll experience guilt less frequently.
- You will not be so eager to avoid responsibility. You'll no longer see rules as a refuge.

We won't take the space required to explain all the items on this list, but every one of them ties back, directly, to the changes we described in this issue.

TO CONCLUDE

This was heavy material and more than enough for one issue. Actually, you may want to re-read this one after a couple of days.

That said, isn't it ironic that by accepting our “flaws,” we make ourselves better?

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See you next month.

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