

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOODNESS:
How Can We Make the World Better?

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Psychology is an organized system of thinking about aspects of human behavior. For purposes of this presentation, I wish to use the term “psychology” in a looser sense, relating what I have called the psychology of goodness to the implications to behaviors and attitudes when the formal axiology of Robert S. Hartman is put into practice.

Our colleagues Leon Pomeroy and John Davis have proposed a synthesis of psychology and formal axiology which they call behavioral axiology.¹ Pomeroy states

A behavioral axiology with a command of a moral science or value science offers much to the mental health movement and to the larger picture of international relations where a moral logic having the universality of a mathematics will contribute much to cross cultural communication and peace making efforts. A behavioral axiology could go far in filling the gap left by present systems of law and discourse.ⁱⁱ

In a world which seems filled with conflict, such an applied science is sorely needed.

How can we help stimulate the motivation to rise to goodness – to ethical and moral behavior in all arenas? Dr. Hartman believed in the innate goodness of people, while recognizing that it is unactualized in some. He stated that “the principle of good in the world outweighs the principle of bad.”ⁱⁱⁱ With the exception of cases who are pathological and some others who seem to be just plain mean, I also subscribe to the belief that people generally aspire to goodness. Why then do we see so much unethical and mean spirited behavior by individuals, by businesses, and by governments? We human beings encounter a number of negative aspects of ourselves which can interfere with our becoming our best selves – things such as greed, power, ego, desire for instant gratification, and fear, for example. These elements emanate from the psychology of badness, which has its roots in unbalanced self interest. We are all capable of the good and the bad, and we need the value sensitivity to understand both.

In Sigmund Freud’s theory, the superego is supposed to keep these undesirable tendencies in check. In practice, we see many instances in which these negative aspects have gotten out of hand. I am not speaking of circumstances where a bad outcome has been the result of good intentions and poor judgment. (We would like to have an impact on these situations as well by improving decision making through applied formal axiology.) I am addressing the situations when the motivation to do good is put aside in favor of some self interest – whether the “self” is an individual or a collective entity such as a company or the state.

Wayne Carpenter, in “Why Good People Do Bad Things,” identified a number of risk conditions in which an individual may lack value capacity, misinterpret the value situation, or choose to exhibit bad behavior, all the result of value insensitivities.^{iv} Basically, what we seem to have in many instances is a devaluation of the intrinsic dimension, although the extrinsic and systemic may also be involved.

In a previous paper given in 1997 at the Annual Meeting of the Hartman Institute, I reviewed the history of humankind, in a broad and cursory manner, with an axiological perspective.^v The theme in that presentation was that we are in a slow progression, evolving from a predominantly systemic approach to dealing with the world (beginning about 4000 years ago), to a predominantly extrinsic mode (the past 2000 years), to the present day – the advent of the intrinsic era. Of course, all three dimensions of value – systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic were and are always present, but the premise is that in this march of time one was the underlying *modus operandi*.

Arianna Huffington in her book *The Fourth Instinct: The Call of the Soul*^{vi} explores the idea that there is a universal drive to find meaning and purpose and that we are at a point where this search can be transforming in our world. This drive is what she calls the fourth instinct, which has a profound effect on how the first three instincts – survival, aggression (power), and sex -- are manifested.

The Fourth Instinct connects us with an inner knowledge that can liberate us from the fears, anxieties and attachments of our survival behavior. It brings perspective to what we value and what we fear, restoring the first instinct to its original purpose of protecting us from actual threats to our survival, thereby preserving body and freeing soul.^{vii}

Connection with meaning and purpose can also modify the will to power, which is an attempt to fill the vacuum, with appropriate self assertion and creativity in dealing with the world. Alfred Adler's theory on aggression points out that feelings of insufficiency and inferiority are at the heart of the striving for power and its inappropriate manifestations.^{viii}

The sexual drive, at its most fundamental, is the motivation to continue human existence; at its height it is an intimate intrinsic experience.

She states

Freeing ourselves from the prison of our first three instincts is the mandatory next step in our evolution. . . . The Fourth Instinct is both the bridge to this next stage in man's evolution and the voice calling us to cross over – from competition to cooperation and community, from the exclusively material to the all-encompassing spiritual. In the fulfillment of man's being in nature, the ultimate scheme of nature is itself fulfilled. Beyond biology, it is an evolutionary spiral based on a different set of imperatives – for now the survival of the fittest will be the survival of the wisest.^{ix}

In our axiological venacular, the wisest will be the most value sensitive.

If we can take the leap of faith to assume that we are at the dawn of an intrinsic age, either as I have proposed or through the Fourth Instinct, what can we do to enhance goodness in our world. How do we counter racism, discrimination, abuse, genocide, and other human rights violations, as well as lack of compassion and crimes against the environment – to name a few? How do we encourage people to treat each other with kindness in their daily interactions?

Dr. Hartman made an assertion many years ago that “the need for spiritual growth is the greatest human need there is.”^x It involves the development of the inner self and with this growth comes what I shall call the will to goodness.

Dr. Hartman gives four fundamental rules for self development, synthesized from historical wisdom:

1. From Socrates, KNOW THYSELF. Find out what kind of person you are and what you have to work with.
2. From Soren Kierkegaard, CHOOSE THYSELF. Accept what you are and work with it.
3. From Pico della Mirandola (and also Kierkegaard), CREATE THYSELF. Become the best you can be.
4. From Jesus, GIVE THYSELF. Be generous and learn to love your neighbor as yourself.^{xi}

He also addresses two modes of living in the world which lead to opposing attitudes and behaviors. The first is the person of fear, a morally insecure individual, a “cosmic pessimist.” The second is the person of faith, a morally secure individual, a “cosmic optimist.”^{xii} He characterizes their approaches to the world in this way:

Person of Fear	vs	Person of Faith
Defiant, attitude of superiority	vs	humble, without arrogance / pretension
Aggressive and combative	vs	serene
Competitive	vs	cooperative
Cynical	vs	humane
Greedy	vs	generous
Vain	vs	unpretentious
Easily hurt, touchy	vs	self-possessed, not easily hurt
Cowardly (afraid of the world)	vs	bold and courageous
Everything is a struggle	vs	buoyant
Focuses on the irrelevant	vs	sees true relationships
Inconsistent, hesitant	vs	persevering, patient
Rigid	vs	flexible, spontaneous
Indifferent, callous	vs	compassionate ^{xiii}

Obviously, no one can fully demonstrate the Person of Faith characteristics; we are all mixtures of the two, but we can work toward such a profile. Hartman also suggested some steps for achieving qualitative growth:

1. Take spiritual teaching seriously
2. Grow through life’s personal crises
3. Develop sensibilities
4. Develop intellect
5. Pursue peak experiences
6. Reflect about one’s life – What am I here for? What is the meaning of my work? How can my work situation or my life situation help me fulfill my meaning in the world?^{xiv}

This has led us back to Harrington’s Fourth Instinct – finding our meaning and purpose.

The above list of characteristics of faith and self development are the kind of things which put the psychology of goodness into action. Personal values, ethics, and morals get translated into global actions; after all, it is individuals who make governmental decisions, for example. Taking a slogan from the environmental movement, if we “think globally and act locally,” we impact our world. It is a personal responsibility to develop the self, such as described above. I tell my patients that if they want to make the world a better place, they must begin with themselves. As they become better persons and change their behaviors and attitudes, the world is made better by that much.

David Mefford has also described an axiological blueprint for personal self knowledge and self development^{xv} and Vera Mefford has demonstrated applications to improving business management and decision making.^{xvi} Frank Forrest has developed curricula for teaching formal axiology and demonstrated their positive impact on students' decision making abilities.^{xvii} Our world needs the application of these principles to be motivators for goodness.

There is a recent best selling novel in the United States, which has also been made into a movie, entitled *Pay It Forward*.^{xviii} In this story, a social studies teacher gives his class this extra credit assignment: "Think of an idea for world change, and put it into action."^{xix} The twelve year old principal character, Trevor, conceives the idea of doing three significant good deeds to people he would not ordinarily be helping and committing them, not to paying him back, but to paying the good deed forward to three other people who do the same, and so forth – a sort of multilevel marketing plan of good deeds. He was not successful in performing three good deeds himself, and was violently killed in an attempt to intervene in a situation while trying to do his third. By this time he was almost fourteen and his plan had taken hold and touched many lives. Twenty thousand people gathered to memorialize him – strangers affected by his plan – and the millions watching on television were challenged to carry the movement onward, to reclaim the world through acts of kindness.

In this fanciful, fictional story lies the dream for us – that the legacy of formal axiology which Dr. Hartman left us becomes a world transforming dynamic; that the psychology of goodness in action in individual lives be an affirmation great enough to overcome the negatives of greed, ego, power, selfishness, abuse, etc. and we truly begin to realize the intrinsic age.

ⁱ Leon Pomeroy and John Davis, "Introduction to Behavioral Axiology: Validity Study of Hartman's Valuemetrics and Value Science Assumptions," *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Cattell 16PF* (Champaign, Illinois: The Institute for Personality and Aptitude Testing, 1982). Paper was given before the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association in New Orleans, Louisiana, 1982.

ⁱⁱ Leon Pomeroy and Arthur R. Ellis, "Psychology and Value Theory," *Forms of Value and Valuation*, Rem B. Edwards and John W. Davis, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1991), p.292.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert S. Hartman, *Freedom To Live*, Arthur R. Ellis, ed. (Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), p. 149.

^{iv} Wayne Carpenter, "Why Good People Do Bad Things," *Forms of Value and Valuation*, Rem B. Edwards and John W. Davis, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1991), pp. 345-378.

^v Arthur R. Ellis, "Speculations on the Axiological Dimensions and the Evolution of the Aquarian Age," presented at the R. S. Hartman Institute Annual Meeting, Knoxville, TN, Sept. 19, 1997.

^{vi} Arianna Huffington, *The Fourth Instinct: The Call of the Soul* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p.48.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

^x Hartman, p. 104.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 114.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, pp. 114-116.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, pp. 120-128.

^{xv} David Mefford, "Self Knowledge and Self Development," *Forms of Value and Valuation*, Rem B. Edwards and John W. Davis, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: University of America press, 1991), pp. 329-343.

^{xvi} Vera Mefford, "Uses of Axiology in Business," *Forms of Value and Valuation*, Rem B. Edwards and John W. Davis, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: University of America Press, 1991), pp. 211-228.

^{xvii} Frank G. Forrest, *Valuometrics: The Science of Personal and Professional Ethics* (Daytona Beach, Florida: Frank G. Forrest).

^{xviii} Catherine Ryan Hyde, *Pay It Forward* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

^{xix} *Ibid.*, p. 47.