

Killing The Cop In Your Head

Essentialism, phenomenology and liberation.

Anarchist Tranny Against Civilization

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There is a war being waged on our minds. Not just the propaganda war intended to win our support for subjugation of ourselves or others, not just the war to augment or replace our minds usefulness with technological tricks; there is a war on and its aim is to warp your ways of thinking so much as to offer no alternative.

With our myopia towards the present moment, it would be easy to assume I mean to speak of something new, but this war on thought and on our own relationships to our bodies minds, is a fundamental mechanism of domestication, of civilization. It has been adapted to serve the related, but newer, ends of white supremacy, or patriarchy, or colonialism, but it is a war still, not because it hasn't been won and lost by either the side many times over, but because it must be fought anew every generation.

Every great cultural turning comes along with the opening of a new front in the war for the autonomy of our minds.

All political movements talk about consciousness raising, hearts and minds, red pill moments, epiphanies, radicalization. It is no secret that the contents of our political beliefs (e.g. our values but operationalized) is the first front of any campaign of public awareness and the first target of any social movement.

Sometimes this mind-changing or awakening is centered on deep fears and pre-existing prejudices masquerading as common sense, sometimes it centers on "Great Men", "great ideas" and "great goals", and sometimes it comes from a deep unquenchable desire for liberation. The shape of the influence for better or worse, looks similar regardless of the intended value direction of an awakening.

So if we wish to understand the seed of political and social change, our priority and inquiry is the minds of the intended audience and one's own mind.

While I do know a great deal about psychology, and a fair amount about neuroscience (and this knowledge does influence my thinking), I want to talk about this through a lens that is less focused on either a mechanistic approach to explaining and modifying our behavior and cognition, or a biologically essentialist quest to describe the emergent property that is our minds, via our bodies alone.

Instead I want to talk about the phenomenology of belief, and the ways that we constrain our liberatory imagination by questioning our thoughts, our world, the facts, but move forward into a parody of repetition because of a failure to challenge the very workings of our own minds. Thinking, evaluating, coming to conclusions without simply following your gut, is a skill, and a skill which can be taught. More often, in order to further the march of control via belief, we are taught only how to challenge the surface of our thinking, never the root.

The phenomenology of belief, and the pitfalls of epiphany.

For those of you uncomfortable with the intentionally obtuse and precise terminology of philosophy, what I mean by phenomenology is, the examination of or study of human experience, of experiential phenomenon. All threads of human thought begin here, in our subjective lived experience of the world. This is important to distinguish, from ones place in the world, or the facts of our world. Phenomenology, though interested in the relationship between the world and our experience of it, is primarily focused on the internalized immediate experiential phenomenon.

So when I am asking us to think about the phenomenology of belief, in simpler terms I am asking, what does belief feel like, how does belief work, and how does our experience of belief differ from a sense of knowledge, if it all.

Belief and knowledge.

One way to describe belief would be certainty without regards to evidence; for instance, when we know something, contradictory information can inform or challenge our knowledge, or become integrated with it, when we believe however, we are significantly inclined towards filtering new information with deference to our beliefs. Of course the line between knowledge and belief as experienced is so fuzzy as to sometimes appear a dialectical unity between binary oppositions.

When the believer learns something which challenges their faith they look on it as either a targeted assault to be rejected immediately, or as a misunderstanding promulgated by someone who doesn't know whichever truth they believe. This is not to say there is no doubt in the believer, but that the mechanisms of belief furnish many different methods for the dismissal, modification, or minimization of doubt.

The godless among you are thinking first of how belief in a religious order warps one's perception and information processing; the environmentalists are thinking about climate change denial, the trans people are thinking of TERFs; But I am not thinking about some ideological other, I am here to ask about you, and about myself.

All humans believe things; there may be exceptions to this rule though I know of none; And those beliefs shape every aspect of our lived experience. In some ways the phenomenology of belief is a less obtuse way to ask about the phenomenology of spirit or a more liberatory way to ask about the phenomenology of being.

So to think about how belief feels, how belief manifests in our daily lives, I will start with an example drawn from belief of self, where the outside world is a secondary actor in our drama.

The belief about self I want to examine is one I have sometimes held myself, and have also seen proliferating amongst many of my peers; this being the belief "I am broken."

So we must first start with definitions. Broken refers to something formerly whole which is now in parts, broken apart, or something with a specific purpose which is no longer able to serve that purpose. To say that a person, that you yourself, are broken one must assume multiple things about themselves or another: one must objectify.

When we believe ourselves to be broken, we are accepting multiple false premises about ourselves.

1. we must have some fated natural purpose, and natural state of being.
2. we accept that there is a fine dividing line between broken and whole
3. we put a discrete value judgment on ourselves, based on a conception of brokenness which ranks being broken as something indistinguishable from sin.

Of course there are functions we are forced to perform, as workers, or tenants, or friends; as child, as parent, as taxpayer or tax avoider; and we are sometimes correct in our belief that we are not meeting these functions. e.g.. I am currently working full time and still struggling to pay

rent. If I were an object for the accumulation of money and paying of rent, this struggle would suggest that I am broken, a non-functional rent producing, money making machine. And in order to feel bad about this, about being a machine which is unable to perform its intended purpose, I must also accept the belief that I am purpose built, and that the function I am failing to perform is necessary, natural, and good. In framing things this way, I go from a relatively objective and useful observation, “I am not making enough money to pay rent.”, and attach to it cultural values of morality, which serve to shame me for my poverty, and justify the indignity of the hustle and the grind.

Beliefs about the self are difficult to examine, have developed over our lifetimes, and are constantly influencing our approaches to the world.

We believe we are broken because we have been told that we have a purpose, intrinsic or socially bestowed, that it is a sin to not serve that purpose, and that the sinful are both weak and unable to do right, and somehow also responsible for their own failure to serve a prescribed function.

This is the logic of ableism, of capitalism turned inward. When we believe ourselves to be broken, we accept the truth of the fascist idea that there are useless eaters, that each person has a role as specific as a cog in a machine, and that those who fail at their role as a good cog are essentially bad.

The believer of this lie “I am broken”, is focused on one feature of their current condition, the way in which they are not meeting their purpose as handed down from society and then internalized. “I’m not meeting my function as a child, as a friend, as an employee, as an adult.” Etc

In a hyper focus of emotional resonance, shame, fear, guilt, the believer sees, correctly, that they do not fit to some set of values, to their social role, but accepts the value proposition, turning the accurate idea of “I feel bad about not meeting my own / society’s expectations for what I should be.”, into “my current inability to meet my role is evil, my fault, something I have no power to change and makes me into a *bad person*.” You can extrapolate how this might feel different when this idea is put through a process of examination rather than through the filter of belief; it goes something like “I am not meeting my expected role, do I care? and if I care, what next?”

Essentialism

Many of our beliefs about ourselves, about our world, are rooted in essentialism; this being the idea that there is an intrinsic or natural meaning, purpose, or function to something. *Esse* in Latin is being. That which is a foundational part of our being is what is essential.

Readers of this are likely familiar with three philosophical movements against essentialism, the existentialists, the nihilists, and the gender abolitionists.

Because it is a particularly clear, and more focused example, I will start with the essentialism gender abolitionists argue against, biological essentialism.

Biological essentialism is the belief that our being, ourselves, our very nature, is determined entirely by our biology. This essentialism is an easy place to start because of how obvious the contradictions are. Usually biological essentialists have a rather poor grasp on biology, or at least the aspects of biology they claim determine our very being.

A biological essentialist might think I was born with a penis therefore I am a man, if I had been born with a vagina I would have been a woman. Sex in the biological sense doesn't exist as a binary, in fact the very concept of gender as a separate thing from sex was popularized in order to preserve the myth of the sex gender binary after the unwanted discovery that there is no binary in sex, none in biology as a whole.

So this biological essentialism gets to a few key things about belief and value judgment. So what would it take to believe in biological essentialism?

1. biology is destiny: first you must believe that our biology is determinative rather than mutative or adaptive. There are no shoulds in biology, but we often think of the fittest as a category of self rather than a category of adaptation to a specific biological niche.
2. Things that exist are meant to be the way they are: instead of seeing that there is perpetual variation in life and ways of life, because of the future is unknowable. If a species gets nothing but drought those of them better able to survive persist, but if they get nothing but flood it is those who can swim who survive. The amphibian wasn't meant to be an amphibian. It simply is. Humans are the same way.
3. Value, a good or bad exists in biology; to be a biological essentialist, one must also believe that being what we are meant to be, is good; That my body is not mine, but that I belong to my body. If you were born a man it is good to be a man, you will always be a man and that is about you, not society, and fighting against that is immoral.

Replace the words a man with disabled to further illustrate the absurdity of this mindset.

The existentialists and nihilists argue against essentialism more broadly. The founding idea of existentialism as stated by Sartre was "existence precedes essence", e.g. we exist, and then construct meaning on top of that. An essentialist says meaning, purpose, being, all come first. An existentialist says, existence comes first, we must make our own meaning.

The nihilist position on essentialism agrees that we do not come into this world with purpose, meaning, or cause, and though, if one exists they must find some sense of meaning, all meaning is false or limited. The existentialists would replace essence with existence, we nihilists would replace it with nothing.

Essentialism is one category of foundational belief which causes many other warpings of logic and self-deceptions. Once one has accepted an essentialism into their beliefs, there is a cascading set of consequences of thought, unnoticed while influencing the way we judge values, learn, and think.

Anti-essentialism and liberation

Essentialism is one of many forces we must fight in order to obtain liberation of any kind. Essentialism forces us into a specific analysis of the world, where certain things are as they should be; a mindset where we see the tools of our own subjugation as uniform and insurmountable

obstacles rather than cobbled together death traps. Essentialism causes us to limit ourselves not only in our actions, but in our very conceptions of self.

When I say liberation, I mean liberation from all oppressive systems, I mean actual autonomy and self-determination for the individual. I mean that the only thing true about existence is that we do in fact exist, and if all of us are meaningless, have no shoulds, why can't everyone make their own choices, form their own bonds, make something that can be, that will be, that is, rather than focusing on something that should be.

Challenging our own mechanisms of belief, our own essentialisms is necessary for the freeing of our minds. A free mind is much better at loosening chains. There are material actions one would need to take in order to strike back against white supremacy, trans genocide, colonial genocide, capitalism, the patriarchy, but our ways of belief and unexamined essentialisms, force us into eternal repetition of the same battles with no change in outcome.

There is a war for our minds, it is in service of the state, of violent oppression, of prison, of work, but its lack of obvious physical consequences does not make it any less important. Right now the forces of order, of control, they are winning while keeping one hand tied behind their backs, because we are doing the losing for them; neutering the true possibilities because of our inability to kill the cop we've gotten most comfortable with, the one in our heads.

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