

How I stopped being mad

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I thought you might find it useful to know how and why I went mad, and how I became sane again. If you feel the following account will help another, please feel free to share it with them.

Shakespeare said in Hamlet that the greatest gift a man may possess is to “know thyself”¹. If you do not know yourself, you cannot know what will make you happy, what you should do in life or even where you are and where you are going. A few people are born knowing their true nature and never have to wrestle with the feelings of despair, loneliness and lack of self-identity. However, the majority of people never know their true nature, and the some remaining must struggle to find their path – often not finding it until they are well past their forties or even much older again. For those some who are able to discover their true nature, maybe this account of my own partial transformation can help accelerate the process.

Each human is composed of webs of consciousness. All are based in genetics, but the genetics specify few webs themselves and rather specify the nature than the form of the webs. These webs are many and interdependent, but they fall into groups: (i) cultural (ii) societal and (iii) personal in that order of effect of magnitude on the person’s makeup. The first group has its bounds almost entirely set in stone by the age of six, the second by the age of eleven to twelve and the third by age twenty-one. They correspond to the stages of hardening of neural pathways in the brain which occur in developmental bursts. To put this another way, the first is mostly set as an infant, the second before teenagerhood and the last by adulthood.

This is not to say that that these webs are fixed forever. Rather, their *bounds* are set meaning that the flexibility of changing them becomes far harder past that age. This may seem bad from a Darwinian position, but in fact if these webs were looser it would become very hard to reach adult stages of thought. Think of it this way – you cannot build a lasting building on shifting foundations². For those tiny few who can, they invariably become founders of a new religion³.

To know oneself is to see past one’s own self-perception. This is hard – our webs of consciousness do not reside entirely within us, but rather they flow through our culture, society and peer group – or in other words, through other people whom we can only indirectly control. When we converse with another, our mind flows out through the person we speak with, who modifies it and reflects it back to us – thus when we converse with another, we mostly are speaking with ourselves⁴.

Thus much of how we see ourselves is how our culture, society and peer group think we *ought* to see ourselves. This is in fact generally a good thing – it saves us having to figure out the vast majority of things for ourselves because we simply inherit understanding from others. On the other hand, the cost is that when those around us make a mistake, we also inherit that misunderstanding

¹ There is a quote in Hamlet somewhere containing the precise phrase which every public school boy was required to learn for many decades. In my case, my English teacher said that if you remembered any Shakespeare for the rest of your life, it should be that phrase.

² This and what follows does not use the orthodox view of cognition, but rather the Santiago Theory of Cognition.

³ Buddha and Christ certainly come to mind here. Both were reputed to be astonishingly able children.

⁴ If this seems unlikely, the eye works almost identically. Only 15% of the traffic along your optic nerve comes from external stimuli – or put another way, 85% of what you see is generated by your own mind.

of reality. If you examine the historical evolution of human thought, it is a series of small groups of people perceiving a mistake made by society and persuading them of an improved understanding. Sometimes this new understanding is even more wrong than that which it replaced, but more often society does not take on the full message and only implements part of the new understanding, often with unexpected results.

Our culture and society tries to set norms. To kill or abuse is evil, to steal is wrong, to victimise and bully immoral, to subjugate and dominate frowned upon. Yet every human being is capable of these⁵. However, most humans are not capable of *initiating* these in all possible areas and perversely, those most able to do good in society must reconcile themselves to the fact that knowing how to do good requires an equal knowledge of how to do bad. A man can tell his friend that his wife is cheating on him – equally, he can malevolently manipulate the friend into thinking his wife is cheating on him. For everything good one can initiate, one can very easily flip the coin and via a very similar mechanism initiate something bad.

Our Christianity-derived culture holds that the best way of biasing people in favour of initiating good is through repression of thinking of initiating bad. For example, most people dislike busy streets with others getting in their way and may feel an impulse to hit them. Or a man may observe a woman and feel an impulse to forcibly have sex with her. Overwhelmingly, most people do not put these impulses into action unless their usual forms of self-repression are disabled, usually by stress, tiredness or consumption of alcohol⁶.

However some do act on these impulses on a normal basis. Usually, these people fall into one of two camps: (i) they either haven't yet fully inherited the self-control machinery from society eg; they are young or immature or have some sort of personality or learning defect or (ii) they have transcended such forms of socially imposed control. The former are far more common than the latter, and one can act on an impulse by carrying out something similar to the impulse.

For example, you may observe a person standing on a railway platform. You may feel an impulse to push this person in front of an oncoming train. Most people repress this impulse by stopping it reaching consciousness, but a transcended person permits the impulse to flow through them in a harmless way eg; by imagining the event and delighting in the screams and body parts which fly outwards. This is a negative impulse example, but a more positive example might be an impulse to sweep a girl off her feet and give her a passionate kiss. However, similarly to the previous example, this implies disturbing another who may not appreciate your actions, so once again you can either repress or redirect flow. Interestingly, most men will happily redirect flow for impulses to kiss women but will repress for impulses to kiss men – this is a clear case of inherited cultural and societal conditioning.

Self-control is a feedback loop: An event occurs. The mind chooses whether to perceive it. By perceiving it, it is given meaning. This meaning may elicit an emotional response such as disgust. The emotional response causes the organism to take action eg; to turn away. By taking action, the emotional response is either strengthened or weakened *depending on the perceived success of the action*.

⁵ The Milgram experiment showed that more than half would blindly follow orders, roughly 15% raised objections but carried on and only 35% refused to complete the test. Those who can initiate can get many others to carry out things they would never initiate on their own.

⁶ A good indicator of the balance of repression and impulse redirection is how people change when very drunk. If they are virtually the same as when sober, they mostly redirect their impulses. If they are considerably more sexually aggressive, or garrulous, or some other noticeable change above and beyond the physiological effects of alcohol then they mostly repress their impulses. Note a person can repress one part of their personality and be very comfortable with another.

However emotional responses are generated by a mental representation of reality, which in turn is generated by emotional responses. Every mind works with a model of reality with that model being an inaccurate and sometimes very inaccurate depiction of reality. Most of this mental model is inherited from your culture and society, so if your society feels that masturbation or homosexuality is a sin, then you will initially inherit that interpretation and will have to transcend it if you wish to perform either without feelings of guilt, disgust and shame. The emotional responses of guilt, disgust and shame are built into us by our genes, but what generates them is entirely learned as a child and is repeatedly reinforced or deinfirmed by subsequent experience.

Therefore, inaccuracies in your mental model is the primary cause of you not knowing yourself. To get to know yourself, you must make your mental model more accurate by discarding those parts of the model imposed on you by society and replacing them with a better understanding of truth. There are a number of techniques to achieve this, but firstly one must understand a problem of semantics:

How you remember things is very much a product of how you think you *ought* to remember things. Taking my own example, I remember my relationship with Ruth very differently today than I did at the time it was happening⁷. How I thought then of my relationship with Ruth is what sent me mad because I had defined myself as having her being a part of me. When our relationship ended, the representation of reality I had built myself became fundamentally contradictory with itself at a core level, causing an increasing fall into paranoia, delusions, hallucinations and self-loathing.

Everyone's mental model contradicts itself. When the contradiction is more than surface deep, it leads to despair and a lack of self-knowing. When the contradiction becomes deeper, more fundamental, the effects become worse. When the problem is deep enough, and when the mind realises that this problem is a core one, the mind responds by trying to generate consistency and thus starts unravelling everything related to the source of the problem. When in my case my mental model began to unravel itself, the effects became progressively worse as one's entire apparatus for understanding the external and internal worlds began to disintegrate⁸.

At the core of my problem was that I had lied to myself because I preferred to believe the lie rather than reality – that Ruth and I could never work. Often the core of other people's problems is that they think something happened to them which their conditioning says *ought* to be what they think happened to them, when in fact something quite different happened. For example, if a painful event happens eg; your girlfriend cheats on you, society may take the view that she was in the wrong and you are in the right. However, if you did not sexually satisfy her because you are in fact gay, then in reality you are more in the wrong for misleading her and probably causing her a great deal of disappointment and pain. Thus her infidelity may cause you to become very depressed because subconsciously you know that you are the cause, but you have repressed a better, more accurate understanding of yourself and thus caused a core mental model inconsistency.

Conditioning mostly affects conscious retrieval of memory. However your memory is often far better than you think, it's just not accessible to you. How I became sane again was to fix my

⁷ Something the poor girl still doesn't understand. She can't see how I could so completely change my interpretation of what happened from something far to the extreme on one side of her memory to completely the opposite side. Explaining what I have in this article is extremely hard in Spanish, though I did try at the time!

⁸ Remember, as I said in a previous footnote, 85% of what you see comes from within. If your mental model unravels, you literally start hearing and seeing things which aren't happening as your subconscious imposes itself on your conscious mind. Seeing into your own subconscious is usually only possible on high doses of Ecstasy, LSD, Mushrooms and some other strong hallucinogens.

memory by restoring it closer to what actually happened rather than what I thought ought to have happened.

The technique is very simple⁹, though it's also rather harsh on your short-term happiness:

1. Determine what are the most painful memories which you think are related to your problem.
2. Every night, before you sleep, reimagine the painful situation like a waking dream. Ideally you do this just as you fall asleep. You may find repeating it over and over again in your mind useful.
3. Your subconscious mind will explore that memory and everything related to it as you sleep. Pathways which had been deenforced due to repression will become reinforced.
4. Over the next few weeks, you will realise many things you had forgotten, and one day it will all suddenly click together and you will have a new understanding of the memory. Your mental model will have just become improved. It may take many months, or even years to come to a full realisation of your improved mental model but once you fix it, everything else will take care of itself over time.

In this process, you need to remember a few things: (i) The more painful the thought or memory, usually the better. (ii) You need to do this every night without fail. Doing so shows your commitment to fix your mental model and to get better. Trying to cop out by saying "I'm too tired tonight" or "I couldn't be bothered" or more commonly "It hurts too much to think about it" shows you are not yet ready to transcend and you will need to suffer some more despair, loneliness and unhappiness before you become ready. I'll put it crudely and brutally – do you want to keep suffering at a low level, or endure a lot of pain now to free yourself forever?¹⁰

And (iii), the most important – **be honest with yourself**. Maybe a part of you secretly enjoyed the horrible thing that happened to you. Maybe you do delight in dreaming about serial-murdering people. Maybe you do like torturing small animals. There is nothing wrong with thinking evil thoughts – you must think them to think good thoughts – it is necessary in order to be well balanced. Where right and wrong come in is *what you do with these thoughts* – if and how you actualise them into reality¹¹.

Only by being truly honest with yourself can you ever truly get to know yourself; only by truly knowing yourself can you really know what you can do; and only by truly knowing what you can do, can you know what you want to do. This is how I discovered my path. I hope you find it useful in discovering yours.

⁹ This technique is actually really useful for a whole pile of things. If I have a problem to solve, or an important article to write like this one I am writing now, I perform this technique. Before long it becomes second nature and you will do it automatically *every* time you go to sleep. It is in fact a meditative technique which the modern world has forgotten and it is the same mechanism used by psychologists when working with clients.

¹⁰ You don't want to use this technique on every single painful thing that happened to you ever. It might sound tempting, but I think you still need some painful, embarrassing memories to haunt you. Without them you lose part of the human condition, and also distance yourself so far from societal norms you could no longer properly connect with them and without others, you cannot be.

¹¹ People get pretty good by their late teens at knowing what to do to fix something. A lot though forget *when* to do something is as important as what to do.