

Narcissism, Narcissists, and Abusive Relationships

Epistolary Dialog between:

©[Stephen McDonnell](#) and [Sam Vaknin](#)

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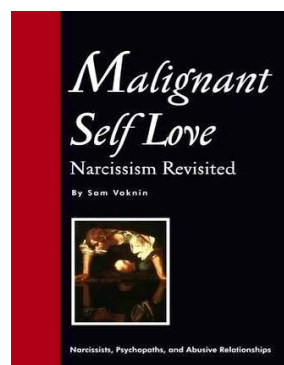
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1st conversation with Sam, my questions to Sam and his answers are intermixed as in a conversation; we write each other by email, and then reply or riposte as we see fit.

Dear Sam,

I want to thank you for inviting me to have a dialogue on Narcissism. As I have written you before, thanks to [your web site](#), I discovered the mental disease called Narcissistic Personality Disorder. This has helped me understand people in my own life as well as enabling me to come to terms to my personal history. As we discussed, I don't think it is appropriate to talk in specifics about my personal life; I don't think I suffer from NPD, but I know I have suffered from people who have NPD.

My admiration for you and [your web site](#) is based on the simple fact that you have been very honest about your narcissism. It is very difficult, based on my own experiences, for anyone who has NPD to admit he or she has it, or to even talk about it rationally. You seemed to have overcome this barrier and have become self aware, even self critical; there must be some satisfaction for you in that as a narcissist.

My first question for you, or the topic of discussion that we can bat around first, is this; is there such a thing as a good narcissist? All that I have seen written on people with NPD tends to be negative. Yet after reading Dr. Albert Bernstein's book entitled Emotional Vampires I have come to the conclusion, as did the author, that narcissism is necessary to succeed in life. Is this a contradiction in terms? Will altruistic people necessarily fail and self centered people eventually succeed in life?

Take for example politicians. A shy self-effacing politician is a rarity. How many actors hide from their public? Now even working people are vying for attention, and money, in reality shows. Jerry Springer has tapped a wellspring of people who want to be famous, even for the most reprehensible behaviors. Where are the success stories of the honest Joe, or honest Jane? For every hard working businessman or woman, there is the blow hard who wants to have a TV show for his or her self-aggrandizement. Society needs famous people who hog the limelight. The quiet do-gooder, the brilliant nerd, the successful law abiding citizen gets short shrift in our popularity driven society.

Sam:

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for having this dialog with me. I greatly value your work. It makes the complex topic of narcissism accessible to many - yet, without compromising the rigor and accuracy of the information. This is quite a task

(continued below)

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Is pathological narcissism a blessing or a malediction?

The answer is: it depends. Healthy narcissism is a mature, balanced love of oneself coupled with a stable sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Healthy narcissism implies knowledge of one's boundaries and a proportionate and realistic appraisal of one's achievements and traits.

Pathological narcissism is wrongly described as too much healthy narcissism (or too much self-esteem). These are two absolutely unrelated phenomena which, regrettably, came to bear the same title. Confusing pathological narcissism with self-esteem betrays a fundamental ignorance of both.

Pathological narcissism involves an impaired, dysfunctional, immature (True) Self coupled with a compensatory fiction (the False Self). The sick narcissist's sense of self-worth and self-esteem derive entirely from audience feedback. The narcissist has no self-esteem or self-worth of his own (no such ego functions). In the absence of observers, the narcissist shrivels to non-existence and feels dead. Hence the narcissist's preying habits in his constant pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. Pathological narcissism is an addictive behavior.

Still, dysfunctions are reactions to abnormal environments and situations (e.g., abuse, trauma, smothering, etc.).

Paradoxically, his dysfunction allows the narcissist to function. It compensates for lacks and deficiencies by exaggerating tendencies and traits. It is like the tactile sense of a blind person. In short: pathological narcissism is a result of over-sensitivity, the repression of overwhelming memories and experiences, and the suppression of inordinately strong negative feelings (e.g., hurt, envy, anger, or humiliation).

That the narcissist functions at all - is because of his pathology and thanks to it. The alternative is complete decompensation and integration.

In time, the narcissist learns how to leverage his pathology, how to use it to his advantage, how to deploy it in order to maximize benefits and utilities - in other words, how to transform his curse into a blessing.

Narcissists are obsessed by delusions of fantastic grandeur and superiority. As a result they are very competitive. They are strongly compelled - where others are merely motivated. They are driven, relentless, tireless, and ruthless. They often make it to the top. But even when they

do not - they strive and fight and learn and climb and create and think and devise and design and conspire. Faced with a challenge - they are likely to do better than non-narcissists.

Yet, we often find that narcissists abandon their efforts in mid-stream, give up, vanish, lose interest, devalue former pursuits, fail, or slump. Why is that?

Narcissists are prone to self-defeating and self-destructive behaviors.

The Self-Punishing, Guilt-Purging Behaviors

These are intended to inflict punishment on the narcissist and thus instantly relieve him of his overwhelming anxiety.

This is very reminiscent of a compulsive-ritualistic behavior. The narcissist feels guilty. It could be an "ancient" guilt, a "sexual" guilt (Freud), or a "social" guilt. In early life, the narcissist internalized and introjected the voices of meaningful and authoritative others - parents, role models, peers - that consistently and convincingly judged him to be no good, blameworthy, deserving of punishment or retaliation, or corrupt.

The narcissist's life is thus transformed into an on-going trial. The constancy of this trial, the never adjourning tribunal *is* the punishment. It is a Kafkaesque "trial": meaningless, undecipherable, never-ending, leading to no verdict, subject to mysterious and fluid laws and presided over by capricious judges.

Such a narcissist masochistically frustrates his deepest desires and drives, obstructs his own efforts, alienates his friends and sponsors, provokes figures in authority to punish, demote, or ignore him, actively seeks and solicits disappointment, failure, or mistreatment and relishes them, incites anger or rejection, bypasses or rejects opportunities, or engages in excessive self-sacrifice.

In their book "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis, describe the diagnosis of "Masochistic or Self-Defeating Personality Disorder", found in the appendix of the DSM III-R but excluded from the DSM IV. While the narcissist is rarely a full-fledged masochist, many a narcissist exhibit some of the traits of this personality disorder.

The Extracting Behaviors

People with Personality Disorders (PDs) are very afraid of real, mature, intimacy. Intimacy is formed not only within a couple, but also in a workplace, in a neighborhood, with friends, while collaborating on a project. Intimacy is another word for emotional involvement, which is the result of interactions in constant and predictable (safe) propinquity.

PDs interpret intimacy as counter-dependence, emotional strangulation, the snuffing of freedom, a kind of death in installments. They are terrorized by it. To avoid it, their self-destructive and self-defeating acts are intended to dismantle the very foundation of a successful relationship, a career, a project, or a friendship. Narcissists feel elated and relieved after they unshackle these "chains". They feel they broke a siege, that they are liberated, free at last.

Read this:

[The Relief of Being Abandoned](#)

The Default Behaviors

We are all, to some degree, inertial, afraid of new situations, new opportunities, new challenges, new circumstances and new demands. Being healthy, being successful, getting married, becoming a mother, or someone's boss – often entail abrupt breaks with the past. Some self-defeating behaviors are intended to preserve the past, to restore it, to protect it from the winds of change, to self-deceptively skirt promising opportunities while seeming to embrace them.

Moreover, to the narcissist, a challenge, or even a guaranteed eventual triumph, are meaningless in the absence of onlookers. The narcissist needs an audience to applaud, affirm, recoil, approve, admire, adore, fear, or even detest him. He craves the attention and depends on the Narcissistic Supply only others can provide. The narcissist derives sustenance only from the outside - his emotional innards are hollow and moribund.

The narcissist's enhanced performance is predicated on the existence of a challenge (real or imaginary) and of an audience. Baumeister usefully re-affirmed this linkage, known to theoreticians since Freud.

Is our culture narcissistic? Does it reward narcissism?

Allow me two quotes:

"The new narcissist is haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find a meaning in life. Liberated from the superstitions of the past, he doubts even the reality of his own existence. Superficially relaxed and tolerant, he finds little use for dogmas of racial and ethnic purity but at the same time forfeits the security of group loyalties and regards everyone as a rival for the favours conferred by a paternalistic state. His sexual attitudes are permissive rather than puritanical, even though his emancipation from ancient taboos brings him no sexual peace. Fiercely competitive in his demand for approval and acclaim, he distrusts competition because he associates it unconsciously with an unbridled urge to destroy. Hence he repudiates the competitive ideologies that flourished at an earlier stage of capitalist development and distrusts even their limited expression in sports and games. He extols cooperation and teamwork while harbouring deeply antisocial impulses. He praises respect for rules and regulations in the secret belief that they do not apply to himself. Acquisitive in the sense that his cravings have no limits, he does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of nineteenth-century political economy, but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire."

[Christopher Lasch - The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations, 1979]

"A characteristic of our times is the predominance, even in groups traditionally selective, of the mass and the vulgar. Thus, in intellectual life, which of its essence requires and presupposes qualification, one can note the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual, unqualified, unqualifiable..."

[Jose Ortega y Gasset - The Revolt of the Masses, 1932]

In my view, we are surrounded by malignant narcissists. How come this disorder has hitherto been largely ignored? How come there is such a dearth of research and literature regarding this crucial family of pathologies? Even mental health practitioners are woefully unaware of it and unprepared to assist its victims.

The sad answer is that narcissism meshes well with our culture [see: <http://samvak.tripod.com/lasch.html>].

It is kind of a "background cosmic radiation", permeating every social and cultural interaction. It is hard to distinguish pathological narcissists from self-assertive, self-confident, self-promoting, eccentric, or highly individualistic persons. Hard sell, greed, envy, self-centredness, exploitativeness, diminished empathy - are all socially condoned features of Western civilization.

Our society is atomized, the outcome of individualism gone awry. It encourages narcissistic leadership and role models: [see: <http://samvak.tripod.com/15.html>]

Its sub-structures - institutionalized religion, political parties, civic organizations, the media, corporations - are all suffused with narcissism and pervaded by its pernicious outcomes: [see: <http://samvak.tripod.com/14.html>]

The very ethos of materialism and capitalism upholds certain narcissistic traits, such as reduced empathy, exploitation, a sense of entitlement, or grandiose fantasies ("vision").

More about this here: <http://samvak.tripod.com/journal37.html>

Narcissists are aided, abetted and facilitated by four types of people and institutions: the adulators, the blissfully ignorant, the self-deceiving and those deceived by the narcissist.

The adulators are fully aware of the nefarious and damaging aspects of the narcissist's behaviour but believe that they are more than balanced by the benefits - to themselves, to their collective, or to society at large. They engage in an explicit trade-off between some of their principles and values - and their personal profit, or the greater good.

They seek to help the narcissist, promote his agenda, shield him from harm, connect him with like-minded people, do his chores for him and, in general, create the conditions and the environment for his success. This kind of alliance is especially prevalent in political parties, the government, multinational, religious organizations and other hierarchical collectives.

The blissfully ignorant are simply unaware of the "bad sides" of the narcissist- and make sure they remain so. They look the other way, or pretend that the narcissist's behavior is normative, or turn a blind eye to his egregious misbehaviour. They are classic deniers of reality. Some of them maintain a generally rosy outlook premised on the inbred benevolence of Mankind. Others simply cannot tolerate dissonance and discord. They prefer to live in a fantastic world where everything is harmonious and smooth and evil is banished. They react with rage to any information to the contrary and block it out instantly. This type of denial is well evidenced in dysfunctional families.

The self-deceivers are fully aware of the narcissist's transgressions and malice, his indifference, exploitativeness, lack of empathy, and rampant grandiosity - but they prefer to displace the causes, or the effects of such misconduct. They attribute it to externalities ("a rough patch"), or judge it to be temporary. They even go as far as accusing the victim for the narcissist's lapses, or for defending themselves ("She provoked him").

In a feat of cognitive dissonance, they deny any connection between the acts of the narcissist and their consequences ("His wife abandoned him because she was promiscuous, not because of anything he did to her"). They are swayed by the narcissist's undeniable charm, intelligence, or attractiveness. But the narcissist needs not invest resources in converting them to his cause - he does not deceive them. They are self-propelled into the abyss that is narcissism. The [inverted narcissists](#), for instance, is a self-deceiver.

The deceived are people - or institutions, or collectives - deliberately taken for a premeditated ride by the narcissist. He feeds them false information, manipulates their judgement, proffers plausible scenarios to account for his indiscretions, soils the opposition, charms them, appeals to their reason, or to their emotions, and promises the Moon.

Again, the narcissist's incontrovertible powers of persuasion and his impressive personality play a part in this predatory ritual. The deceived are especially hard to deprogram. They are often themselves encumbered with narcissistic traits and find it impossible to admit a mistake, or to atone.

They are likely to stay on with the narcissist to his - and their - bitter end.

Regrettably, the narcissist rarely pays the price for his offenses. His victims pick up the tab. But even here the malignant optimism of the abused never ceases to amaze (read this: <http://samvak.tripod.com/journal27.html>).

Stephen:

Getting back to the main topic, the "good" narcissist. You seem to embody that idea. You are helping people understand your disease. Is it a negation of narcissism to help others or is it just another way of getting narcissistic supply? Beware the do-gooder! Are people with NPD devoid of all feelings, or do they join the human race ever so often, and can be kind and loving? Again you can show me tons of emails that say no, the NPD is always playing a game, even when they are kind and loving. I know of persons in my own life who I consider partially or wholly narcissistic who have helped me and given me love. On the other hand I know of others with NPD who are hypocrites and act out scenarios of kindness and caring. How can you tell the difference? At the risk of sounding cynical, should we always look the gift horse in the mouth?

Sam:

Beware of narcissists carrying gifts. Admittedly, being self-aware, I am an unusual and creative narcissist. I found an original and unique way of extracting narcissistic supply from my sources - by helping them understand my disorder and its destructive and dysfunctional aspects.

Still, we must make a distinction - in this dialog and elsewhere - between people with narcissistic traits and people who suffer from a full-fledged Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

Only a qualified mental health diagnostician can determine whether someone suffers from NPD and this, following lengthy tests and personal interviews.

Moreover, all of us have **narcissistic TRAITS**. Some of us even develop a **narcissistic PERSONALITY, or a narcissistic STYLE**. Moreover, narcissism is a **SPECTRUM of behaviors** - from the healthy to the utterly pathological (a condition known as the **Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or NPD**).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) IV-TR uses this language to describe the malignant narcissist:

"An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts."

So, what matters is that these characteristics, often found in healthy people, appear jointly and not separately or intermittently and that they are all-pervasive (invade, penetrate, and mould every aspect, nook, and cranny of the personality):

1. That grandiose fantasies are abundantly discernible;
2. That grandiose (often ridiculous) behaviors are present;
3. That there is an over-riding need for admiration and adulation or attention ("narcissistic supply");
4. That the person lacks [empathy](#) (regards other people as two dimensional cartoon figures and abstractions, unable to "stand in their shoes");
5. That these traits and behaviors begin, at the latest, in early adolescence;
6. That the narcissistic behaviors pervade all the social and emotional interactions of the narcissist.

Some narcissists are ostentatiously generous – they donate to charity, lavish gifts on their closest, abundantly provide for their nearest and dearest, and, in general, are open-handed and unstintingly benevolent. How can this be reconciled with the pronounced lack of empathy and with the pernicious self-preoccupation that is so typical of narcissists?

(continued below)

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The act of giving enhances the narcissist's sense of omnipotence, his fantastic grandiosity, and the contempt he holds for others. It is easy to feel superior to the supplicating recipients of one's largesse. Narcissistic altruism is about exerting control and maintaining it by fostering dependence in the beneficiaries.

But narcissists give for other reasons as well.

The narcissist flaunts his charitable nature as a bait. He impresses others with his selflessness and kindness and thus lures them into his lair, entraps them, and manipulates and brainwashes them into subservient compliance and obsequious collaboration. People are attracted to the narcissist's larger than life posture – only to discover his true personality traits when it is far too late. "Give a little to take a lot" – is the narcissist's creed.

This does not prevent the narcissist from assuming the role of the exploited victim. Narcissists always complain that life and people are unfair to them and that they invest far more than their "share of the profit". The narcissist feels that he is the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat, and that his relationships are asymmetric and imbalanced. "She gets out of our marriage far more than I do" – is a common refrain. Or: "I do all the work around here – and they get all the perks and benefits!"

Faced with such (mis)perceived injustice – and once the relationship is clinched and the victim is "hooked" – the narcissist tries to minimize his contributions. He regards his input as a contractual maintenance chore and the unpleasant and inevitable price he has to pay for his Narcissistic Supply.

After many years of feeling deprived and wronged, some narcissists lapse into "sadistic generosity" or "sadistic altruism". They use their giving as a weapon to taunt and torment the needy and to humiliate them. In the distorted thinking of the narcissist, donating money gives him the right and license to hurt, chastise, criticize, and berate the recipient. His generosity, feels the narcissist, elevates him to a higher moral ground.

Most narcissists confine their giving to money and material goods. Their munificence is an abusive defense mechanism, intended to avoid real intimacy. Their "big-hearted" charity renders all their relationships – even with their spouses and children – "business-like", structured, limited, minimal, non-emotional, unambiguous, and non-ambivalent. By doling out bounteously, the narcissist "knows where he stands" and does not feel threatened by demands for commitment, emotional investment, empathy, or intimacy.

In the narcissist's wasteland of a life, even his benevolence is spiteful, sadistic, punitive, and distancing.

Stephen:

If a narcissist is doing something that puts him or her in the limelight, and benefits others, then how can we fault them? Narcissists can project images of being the best friend, lover, worker, boss, parent and we accept it hook line and sinker. Is there a litmus test for telling if a gift is a poisoned apple? NPD's are so good at dissimulating their real motives for being nice. In polite societies, good manners can hide hideous crimes. A sweet smile can hide a cold heart. Take the case of the serial killer Ted Bundy. Ted Bundy was a mild mannered "nice boy" who captured the attention of young women by appealing to their better natures; he would fake an injury to get them to help him to his car where he would knock them out with the same crutch he used to seduce them into believing he was a nice person.

Again, is there such a thing as 'good' narcissism? Is narcissism in reality nothing but high self esteem gone wrong? When does it cross the line and become pathological?

Sam:

Well, if a narcissist is functional, not destructive, benefits others, and so on - then his narcissism becomes a private problem, not a social one. Indeed, this is the goal of modern treatments: to ameliorate or even extinguish the narcissist's multiple dysfunctions.

Is there anything you can do to avoid abusers and narcissists to start with? Are there any warning signs, any identifying marks, rules of thumbs to shield you from the harrowing and traumatic experience of an abusive relationship?

Imagine a first or second date. You can already tell if he is a would-be abuser. Here's how:

Perhaps the first telltale sign is the abuser's alloplastic defenses – his tendency to blame every mistake of his, every failure, or mishap on others, or on the world at large. Be tuned: does he assume personal responsibility? Does he admit his faults and miscalculations? Or does he keep blaming you, the cab driver, the waiter, the weather, the government, or fortune for his predicament?

Is he hypersensitive, picks up fights, feels constantly slighted, injured, and insulted? Does he rant incessantly? Does he treat animals and children impatiently or cruelly and does he express negative and aggressive emotions towards the weak, the poor, the needy, the sentimental, and the disabled? Does he confess to having a history of battering or violent offenses or behavior? Is his language vile and infused with expletives, threats, and hostility?

Next thing: is he too eager? Does he push you to marry him having dated you only twice? Is he planning on having children on your first date? Does he immediately cast you in the role of the love of his life? Is he pressing you for exclusivity, instant intimacy, almost rapes you and acts jealous when you as much as cast a glance at another male? Does he inform you that, once you get hitched, you should abandon your studies or resign your job (forgo your personal autonomy)?

Does he respect your boundaries and privacy? Does he ignore your wishes (for instance, by choosing from the menu or selecting a movie without as much as consulting you)? Does he disrespect your boundaries and treats you as an object or an instrument of gratification (materializes on your doorstep unexpectedly or calls you often prior to your date)? Does he go through your personal belongings while waiting for you to get ready?

Does he control the situation and you compulsively? Does he insist to ride in his car, holds on to the car keys, the money, the theater tickets, and even your bag? Does he disapprove if you are away for too long (for instance when you go to the powder room)? Does he interrogate you when you return ("have you seen anyone interesting") – or make lewd "jokes" and remarks? Does he hint that, in future, you would need his permission to do things – even as innocuous as meeting a friend or visiting with your family?

Does he act in a patronizing and condescending manner and criticizes you often? Does he emphasize your minutest faults (devalues you) even as he exaggerates your talents, traits, and skills (idealizes you)? Is he wildly unrealistic in his expectations from you, from himself, from the budding relationship, and from life in general?

Does he tell you constantly that you "make him feel" good? Don't be impressed. Next thing, he may tell you that you "make" him feel bad, or that you make him feel violent, or that you "provoke" him. "Look what you made me do!" is an abuser's ubiquitous catchphrase.

Does he find sadistic sex exciting? Does he have fantasies of rape or pedophilia? Is he too forceful with you in and out of the sexual intercourse? Does he like hurting you physically or finds it amusing? Does he abuse you verbally – does he curse you, demeans you, calls you ugly or inappropriately diminutive names, or persistently criticizes you? Does he then switch to being saccharine and "loving", apologizes profusely and buys you gifts?

If you have answered "yes" to **any** of the above – stay away! He is an abuser.

Then there is the abuser's body language. It comprises an unequivocal series of subtle – but discernible – warning signs. Pay attention to the way your date comports himself – and save yourself a lot of trouble!

Many abusers have a specific body language. It comprises an unequivocal series of subtle – but discernible – warning signs. Pay attention to the way your date comports himself – and save yourself a lot of trouble!

Abusers are an elusive breed, hard to spot, harder to pinpoint, impossible to capture. Even an experienced mental health diagnostician with unmitigated access to the record and to the person examined would find it fiendishly difficult to determine with any degree of certainty whether someone is being abusive because he suffers from an impairment, i.e., a mental health disorder.

Some abusive behavior patterns are a result of the patient's cultural-social context. The offender seeks to conform to cultural and social morals and norms. Additionally, some people become abusive in reaction to severe life crises.

Still, most abusers master the art of deception. People often find themselves involved with a abuser (emotionally, in business, or otherwise) before they have a chance to discover his real nature. When the abuser reveals his true colors, it is usually far too late. His victims are unable to separate from him. They are frustrated by this acquired helplessness and angry that they failed to see through the abuser earlier on.

But abusers do emit subtle, almost subliminal, signals in his body language even in a first or casual encounter. These are:

"Haughty" body language – The abuser adopts a physical posture which implies and exudes an air of superiority, seniority, hidden powers, mysteriousness, amused indifference, etc. Though the abuser usually maintains sustained and piercing eye contact, he often refrains from physical proximity (he maintains his personal territory).

The abuser takes part in social interactions – even mere banter – condescendingly, from a position of supremacy and faux "magnanimity and largesse". But even when he feigns gregariousness, he rarely mingles socially and prefers to remain the "observer", or the "lone wolf".

(continued below)

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Entitlement markers – The abuser immediately asks for "special treatment" of some kind. Not to wait his turn, to have a longer or a shorter therapeutic session, to talk directly to authority figures (and not to their assistants or secretaries), to be granted special payment terms, to enjoy custom tailored arrangements. This tallies well with the abuser's alloplastic defenses - his tendency to shift responsibility to others, or to the world at large, for his needs, failures, behavior, choices, and mishaps ("look what you made me do!").

The abuser is the one who – vocally and demonstratively – demands the undivided attention of the head waiter in a restaurant, or monopolizes the hostess, or latches on to celebrities in a party. The abuser reacts with rage and indignantly when denied his wishes and if treated the same as others whom he deems inferior. Abusers frequently and embarrassingly "dress down" service providers such as waiters or cab drivers.

Idealization or devaluation – The abuser instantly idealizes or devalues his interlocutor. He flatters, adores, admires and applauds the "target" in an embarrassingly exaggerated and profuse manner – or sulks, abuses, and humiliates her.

Abusers are polite only in the presence of a potential would-be victim – a "mate", or a "collaborator". But they are unable to sustain even perfunctory civility and fast deteriorate to barbs and thinly-veiled hostility, to verbal or other violent displays of abuse, rage attacks, or cold detachment.

The "membership" posture – The abuser always tries to "belong". Yet, at the very same time, he maintains his stance as an outsider. The abuser seeks to be admired for his ability to integrate and ingratiate himself without investing the efforts commensurate with such an undertaking.

For instance: if the abuser talks to a psychologist, the abuser first states emphatically that he never studied psychology. He then proceeds to make seemingly effortless use of obscure professional terms, thus demonstrating that he mastered the discipline all the same – which is supposed to prove that he is exceptionally intelligent or introspective.

In general, the abuser always prefers show-off to substance. One of the most effective methods of exposing an abuser is by trying to delve deeper. The abuser is shallow, a pond pretending to be an ocean. He likes to think of himself as a Renaissance man, a Jack of all trades, or a genius. Abusers never admit to ignorance or to failure in any field – yet, typically, they are ignorant and losers. It is surprisingly easy to penetrate the gloss and the veneer of the abuser's self-proclaimed omniscience, success, wealth, and omnipotence.

Bragging and false autobiography – The abuser brags incessantly. His speech is peppered with "I", "my", "myself", and "mine". He describes himself as intelligent, or rich, or modest, or intuitive, or creative – but always excessively, implausibly, and extraordinarily so.

The abuser's biography sounds unusually rich and complex. His achievements – incommensurate with his age, education, or renown. Yet, his actual condition is evidently and demonstrably incompatible with his claims. Very often, the abuser's lies or fantasies are easily discernible. He always name-drops and appropriates other people's experiences and accomplishments as his own.

Emotion-free language – The abuser likes to talk about himself and only about himself. He is not interested in others or what they have to say. He is never reciprocal. He acts disdainful, even angry, if he feels an intrusion on his precious time.

In general, the abuser is very impatient, easily bored, with strong attention deficits – unless and until he is the topic of discussion. One can dissect all aspects of the intimate life of an abuser, providing the discourse is not "emotionally tinted". If asked to relate directly to his emotions, the abuser intellectualizes, rationalizes, speaks about himself in the third person and in a detached "scientific" tone or composes a narrative with a fictitious character in it, suspiciously autobiographical.

Most abusers get enraged when required to delve deeper into their motives, fears, hopes, wishes, and needs. They use violence to cover up their perceived "weakness" and "sentimentality". They distance themselves from their own emotions and from their loved ones by alienating and hurting them.

Seriousness and sense of intrusion and coercion – The abuser is dead serious about himself. He may possess a fabulous sense of humor, scathing and cynical, but rarely is he self-deprecating. The abuser regards himself as being on a constant mission, whose importance is cosmic and whose consequences are global.

If a scientist – he is always in the throes of revolutionizing science. If a journalist – he is in the middle of the greatest story ever. If an aspiring businessman – he is on the way to

concluding the deal of the century. Woe betide those who doubt his grandiose fantasies and impossible schemes.

This self-misperception is not amenable to light-headedness or self-effacement. The abuser is easily hurt and insulted (narcissistic injury). Even the most innocuous remarks or acts are interpreted by him as belittling, intruding, or coercive slights and demands. His time is more valuable than others' – therefore, it cannot be wasted on unimportant matters such as social intercourse, family obligations, or household chores. Inevitably, he feels constantly misunderstood.

Any suggested help, advice, or concerned inquiry are immediately cast by the abuser as intentional humiliation, implying that the abuser is in need of help and counsel and, thus, imperfect. Any attempt to set an agenda is, to the abuser, an intimidating act of enslavement. In this sense, the abuser is both schizoid and paranoid and often entertains [ideas of reference](#).

Finally, abusers are sometimes [sadistic](#) and have [inappropriate affect](#). In other words, they find the obnoxious, the heinous, and the shocking – funny or even gratifying. They are sexually sado-masochistic or deviant. They like to taunt, to torment, and to hurt people's feelings ("humorously" or with bruising "honesty").

While some abusers are "stable" and "conventional" – others are antisocial and their impulse control is flawed. These are very [reckless](#) (self-destructive and self-defeating) and just plain destructive: workaholism, alcoholism, drug abuse, pathological gambling, compulsory shopping, or reckless driving.

Yet, these – the lack of empathy, the aloofness, the disdain, the sense of entitlement, the restricted application of humor, the unequal treatment, the sadism, and the paranoia – do not render the abuser a social misfit. This is because the abuser mistreats only his closest – spouse, children, or (much more rarely) colleagues, friends, neighbours. To the rest of the world, he appears to be a composed, rational, and functioning person. Abusers are very adept at casting a veil of secrecy – often with the active aid of their victims – over their dysfunction and misbehavior.

Letter no 2 October 16, 2004

Thank you Sam for such rich and enlightening answers. You wrote me that you have been involved in a 9-year study of narcissism, and thus yourself. Therefore you can speak with authority on NPD, and PDs. In fact I have gleaned a lot from reading your pages. My own experience has been a more personal one, and my understanding of what makes narcissists tick is at second hand. While I have read other books that treat narcissistic personality disorder directly or indirectly, I still feel like I can only see them as shadowy figures. I will mention in passing the wonderful book by Alice Miller, "The Drama of the Gifted Child, The Search for the True Self" and a more recent book on how to deal with narcissists at work entitled, "Where Egos Dare, the untold truth about narcissistic leaders - and how to survive them" by Dean B McFalin & Paul D Sweeney.

I have reviewed what you wrote in response to my first letter and I would like to address a few things. You are right to be concise in naming the different disorders. One should call a spade a spade. In your web pages you have introduced new labels (I hate to say it but narcissists like to label people and thus objectify them) and new analysis of disorders that

connect to narcissism. I had the hubris to give a name to the victims of NPDs that I call Mirror/Echo Personality Disorder. http://narcissism101.com/Narcissism_101/mirror.html

Unlike the narcissistic sub group described in their book "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", by Theodore Millon and Roger Davis, I believe the "Masochistic or Self-Defeating Personality Disorder", better describes the victims of narcissists. This may be contrary to your assertion that, "While the narcissist is rarely a full-fledged masochist, many a narcissist exhibit some of the traits of this personality disorder." It seems to me that the NPD is more a sadist than a masochist; he or she enjoys causing pain more than suffering pain. (I believe this is why Alice Miller blamed the horrors of World War II on the decades of whipping of young children - those children grew up to be sadistic adults.) While his or her victim enjoys the suffering and pain. Just as every voyeur has a Peeping Tom and every dominant has a submissive, the NPD seeks people who enjoy or who are trained to give narcissistic supply. As you wrote, "Narcissists are aided, abetted and facilitated by four types of people and institutions: the adulators, the blissfully ignorant, the self-deceiving and those deceived by the narcissist." You then go on to list the reasons and characteristics of the abuse. The hopelessly hopeful continue to believe they are at fault, not the NPD.
<http://samvak.tripod.com/journal27.html>

Sam:

On the face of it, there is no (emotional) partner or mate, who typically "binds" with a narcissist. They come in all shapes and sizes. The initial phases of attraction, infatuation and falling in love are pretty normal. The narcissist puts on his best face – the other party is blinded by budding love. A natural selection process occurs only much later, as the relationship develops and is put to the test.

Living with a narcissist can be exhilarating, is always onerous, often harrowing. Surviving a relationship with a narcissist indicates, therefore, the parameters of the personality of the survivor. She (or, more rarely, he) is moulded by the relationship into The Typical Narcissistic Mate/Partner/Spouse.

First and foremost, the narcissist's partner must have a deficient or a distorted grasp of her self and of reality. Otherwise, she (or he) is bound to abandon the narcissist's ship early on. The cognitive distortion is likely to consist of belittling and demeaning herself – while aggrandising and adoring the narcissist.

The partner is, thus, placing herself in the position of the eternal victim: undeserving, punishable, a scapegoat. Sometimes, it is very important to the partner to appear moral, sacrificial and victimised. At other times, she is not even aware of this predicament. The narcissist is perceived by the partner to be a person in the position to demand these sacrifices from her because he is superior in many ways (intellectually, emotionally, morally, professionally, or financially).

The status of professional victim sits well with the partner's tendency to punish herself, namely: with her masochistic streak. The tormented life with the narcissist is just what she deserves.

In this respect, the partner is the mirror image of the narcissist. By maintaining a symbiotic relationship with him, by being totally dependent upon her source of masochistic supply

(which the narcissist most reliably constitutes and most amply provides) – the partner enhances certain traits and encourages certain behaviours, which are at the very core of narcissism.

The narcissist is never whole without an adoring, submissive, available, self-denigrating partner. His very sense of superiority, indeed his False Self, depends on it. His sadistic Superego switches its attentions from the narcissist (in whom it often provokes suicidal ideation) to the partner, thus finally obtaining an alternative source of sadistic satisfaction.

It is through self-denial that the partner survives. She denies her wishes, hopes, dreams, aspirations, sexual, psychological and material needs, choices, preferences, values, and much else besides. She perceives her needs as threatening because they might engender the wrath of the narcissist's God-like supreme figure.

The narcissist is rendered in her eyes even more superior through and because of this self-denial. Self-denial undertaken to facilitate and ease the life of a "great man" is more palatable. The "greater" the man (=the narcissist), the easier it is for the partner to ignore her own self, to dwindle, to degenerate, to turn into an appendix of the narcissist and, finally, to become nothing but an extension, to merge with the narcissist to the point of oblivion and of merely dim memories of herself.

The two collaborate in this [macabre dance](#). The narcissist is formed by his partner inasmuch as he forms her. Submission breeds superiority and masochism breeds sadism. The relationships are characterised by emergentism: roles are allocated almost from the start and any deviation meets with an aggressive, even violent reaction.

The predominant state of the partner's mind is utter confusion. Even the most basic relationships – with husband, children, or parents – remain bafflingly obscured by the giant shadow cast by the intensive interaction with the narcissist. A suspension of judgement is part and parcel of a suspension of individuality, which is both a prerequisite to and the result of living with a narcissist. The partner no longer knows what is true and right and what is wrong and forbidden.

The narcissist recreates for the partner the sort of emotional ambience that led to his own formation in the first place: capriciousness, fickleness, arbitrariness, emotional (and physical or sexual) abandonment. The world becomes hostile, and ominous and the partner has only one thing left to cling to: the narcissist.

And cling she does. If there is anything which can safely be said about those who emotionally team up with narcissists, it is that they are overtly and overly dependent.

The partner doesn't know what to do – and this is only too natural in the mayhem that is the relationship with the narcissist. But the typical partner also does not know what she wants and, to a large extent, who she is and what she wants to become.

These unanswered questions hamper the partner's ability to gauge reality. Her primordial sin is that she fell in love with an image, not with a real person. It is the voiding of the image that is mourned when the relationship ends.

The break-up of a relationship with a narcissist is, therefore, very emotionally charged. It is the culmination of a long chain of humiliations and of subjugation. It is the rebellion of the functioning and healthy parts of the partner's personality against the tyranny of the narcissist.

The partner is likely to have totally misread and misinterpreted the whole interaction (I hesitate to call it a relationship). This lack of proper interface with reality might be (erroneously) labelled "pathological".

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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Why is it that the partner seeks to prolong her pain? What is the source and purpose of this masochistic streak? Upon the break-up of the relationship, the partner (but not the narcissist, who usually refuses to provide closure) engage in a tortuous and drawn out post mortem.

But the question who did what to whom (and even why) is irrelevant. What is relevant is to stop mourning oneself, start smiling again and love in a less subservient, hopeless, and pain-inflicting manner.

You may be unaware of my work on [Inverted Narcissists](#).

Co-dependents

People who depend on other people for their emotional gratification and the performance of Ego or daily functions. They are needy, demanding, submissive. They fear abandonment, cling and display immature behaviours in their effort to maintain the "relationship" with their companion or mate upon whom they depend. No matter what abuse is inflicted upon them – they remain in the relationship.

See also the definition of the Dependent Personality Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR, 2000).

Inverted Narcissist

Also called "covert narcissist", this is a co-dependent who depends exclusively on narcissists (narcissist-co-dependent). If you are living with a narcissist, have a relationship with one, if you are married to one, if you are working with a narcissist, etc. – it does **NOT** mean that you are an inverted narcissist.

To "qualify" as an inverted narcissist, you must **CRAVE** to be in a relationship with a narcissist, regardless of any abuse inflicted on you by him/her. You must **ACTIVELY** seek relationships with narcissists and **ONLY** with narcissists, no matter what your (bitter and traumatic) past experience has been. You must feel **EMPTY** and **UNHAPPY** in relationships with **ANY OTHER** kind of person. Only then, and if you satisfy the other diagnostic criteria of a Dependent Personality Disorder, can you be safely labelled an "inverted narcissist".

Sooner, or later, everyone around the narcissist is bound to become his victim. People are sucked – voluntarily or involuntarily – into the turbulence that constitutes his life, into the black hole that is his personality, into the whirlwind, which makes up his interpersonal relationships.

Different people are adversely affected by different aspects of the narcissist's life and psychological make-up. Some trust him and rely on him, only to be bitterly disappointed. Others love him and discover that he cannot reciprocate. Yet others are forced to live vicariously, through him.

There are three categories of victims:

Victims of the narcissist's instability

The narcissist leads an unpredictable, vicissitudinal, precarious, often dangerous life. His ground is ever shifting: geographically as well as mentally. He changes addresses, workplaces, vocations, avocations, interests, friends and enemies with a bewildering speed. He baits authority and challenges it.

He is, therefore, prone to conflict: likely to be a criminal, a rebel, a dissident, or a critic. He gets bored easily, trapped in cycles of idealisation and devaluation of people, places, hobbies, jobs, values. He is mercurial, unstable, and unreliable. His family suffers: his spouse and children have to wander with him in his private desert, endure the Via Dolorosa that he incessantly walks.

They live in constant fear and trepidation: what next? where next? who is next? To a lesser extent, this is the case with his friends, bosses, colleagues, or with his country. These biographical vacillations and mental oscillations deny the people around him autonomy, unperturbed development and self-fulfilment, their path to self-recognition and contentment.

To the narcissist, other humans are mere instruments, Sources of Narcissistic Supply. He sees no reason to consider their needs, wishes, wants, desires and fears. He derails their life with ease and ignorance. Deep inside he knows that he is wrong to do so because they might retaliate – hence, his persecutory delusions.

Victims of the narcissist's misleading signals

These are the victims of the narcissist's deceiving emotional messages. The narcissist mimics real emotions artfully. He exudes the air of someone really capable of loving or of being hurt, of one passionate and soft, empathic and caring. Most people are misled into believing that he is even more humane than average.

They fall in love with the mirage, the fleeting image, with the fata morgana of a lush emotional oasis in the midst of their emotional desert. They succumb to the luring proposition that he is. They give in, give up, and give everything only to be discarded ruthlessly when judged by the narcissist to be no longer useful.

Riding high on the crest of the narcissist's over-valuation only to crash into the abysmal depths of his devaluation, they lose control over their emotional life. The narcissist drains them, exhausts their resources, sucks the blood-life of Narcissistic Supply from their dwindling, depleted selves.

This emotional roller coaster is so harrowing that the experience borders on the truly [traumatic](#). To remove doubt: this behaviour pattern is not confined to matters of the heart. The narcissist's employer, for instance, is misled by his apparent seriousness, industriousness, ambition, willing to sacrifice, honesty, thoroughness and a host of other utterly fake qualities.

They are fake because they are directed at securing Narcissistic Supply rather than at doing a good job. The narcissist's clients and suppliers may suffer from the same illusion.

The narcissist's false emanations are not restricted to messages with emotional content. They may contain wrong or false or partial information. The narcissist does not hesitate to lie, deceive, or "reveal" (misleading) half-truths. He appears to be intelligent, charming and, therefore, reliable. He is a convincing conjurer of words, signs, behaviours, and body language.

The above two classes of victims are casually exploited and then discarded by the narcissist. No more [malice](#) is involved in this than in any other interaction with an instrument. No more premeditation and contemplation than in breathing. These are victims of narcissistic reflexes. Perhaps this is what makes it all so repulsively horrific: the offhanded nature of the damage inflicted.

Not so the third category of victims.

These are the *victims upon which the narcissist designs*, maliciously and intentionally, to inflict his wrath and bad intentions. The narcissist is both [sadistic](#) and [masochistic](#). In hurting others he always seeks to hurt himself. In punishing them he wishes to be penalised. Their [pains](#) are his.

Thus, he attacks figures of authority and social institutions with vicious, uncontrolled, almost insane rage – only to accept his due punishment (their reaction to his venomous diatribes or antisocial actions) with incredible complacency, or even relief. He engages in vitriolic humiliation of his kin and folk, of regime and government, of his firm or of the law – only to suffer pleasurably in the role of the outcast, the ex-communicated, the exiled, and the imprisoned.

The punishment of the narcissist does little to compensate his randomly (rather incomprehensibly) selected victims. The narcissist forces individuals and groups of people around him to pay a heavy toll, materially, in reputation, and emotionally. He is ruinous, and disruptive.

In behaving so, the narcissist seeks not only to be punished, but also to maintain emotional detachment ([Emotional Involvement Preventive Measures, EIPMs](#)). Threatened by intimacy and by the predatory cosiness of routine and mediocrity – the narcissist lashes back at what he perceives to be the sources of this dual threat. He attacks those he thinks take him for granted, those who fail to recognise his superiority, those who render him "average" and "normal".

And they, alas, include just about everyone he knows.

Stephen:

But are not the victims guilty as well, guilty of at least being stupid, if not ignorant? In my own case I was surprised that all the signs were in front of me, but I refused to see them. Of course when I first started "feeling" that something was wrong with certain people, the DSM IV did not have NPD as a mental disorder (that I can recall). All I could say was they were crazy - crazy like a fox! Has this changed over the years?

Sam:

It takes two to tango – and an equal number to sustain a long-term abusive relationship. The abuser and the abused form a bond, a dynamic, and a dependence. Expressions such as "folie a deux" and the "Stockholm Syndrome" capture facets – two of a myriad – of this danse macabre. It often ends fatally. It is always an excruciatingly painful affair.

Abuse is closely correlated with alcoholism, drug consumption, intimate-partner homicide, teen pregnancy, infant and child mortality, spontaneous abortion, reckless behaviours, suicide, and the onset of mental health disorders. It doesn't help that society refuses to openly and frankly tackle this pernicious phenomenon and the guilt and shame associated with it.

People – overwhelmingly women – remain in an abusive household for a variety of reasons: economic, parental (to protect the children), and psychological. But the objective obstacles facing the battered spouse cannot be overstated.

The abuser treats his spouse as an object, an extension of himself, devoid of a separate existence and denuded of distinct needs. Thus, typically, the couple's assets are on his name – from real estate to medical insurance policies. The victim has no family or friends because her abusive partner or husband frowns on her initial independence and regards it as a threat. By intimidating, cajoling, charming, and making false promises, the abuser isolates his prey from the rest of society and, thus, makes her dependence on him total. She is often also denied the option to study and acquire marketable skills or augment them.

Abandoning the abusive spouse frequently leads to a prolonged period of destitution and peregrination. Custody is usually denied to parents without a permanent address, a job, income security, and, therefore, stability. Thus, the victim stands to lose not only her mate and nest – but also her off-spring. There is the added menace of violent retribution by the

abuser or his proxies – coupled with emphatic contrition on his part and a protracted and irresistible "charm offensive".

Gradually, she is convinced to put up with her spouse's cruelty in order to avoid this harrowing predicament.

But there is more to an abusive dyad than mere pecuniary convenience. The abuser – stealthily but unfailingly – exploits the vulnerabilities in the psychological makeup of his victim. The abused party may have low self-esteem, a fluctuating sense of self-worth, primitive defence mechanisms, phobias, mental health problems, a disability, a history of failure, or a tendency to blame herself, or to feel inadequate (autoplastic neurosis). She may have come from an abusive family or environment – which conditioned her to expect abuse as inevitable and "normal". In extreme and rare cases – the victim is a masochist, possessed of an urge to seek ill-treatment and pain.

The abuser may be functional or dysfunctional, a pillar of society, or a peripatetic con-artist, rich or poor, young or old. There is no universally-applicable profile of the "typical abuser". Yet, abusive behaviour often indicates serious underlying psychopathologies. Absent empathy, the abuser perceives the abused spouse only dimly and partly, as one would an inanimate source of frustration. The abuser, in his mind, interacts only with himself and with "introjects" – representations of outside objects, such as his victims.

Stephen:

In a recent Discover magazine there was a pie chart showing the percentage of PD's, NPD was not included! So despite your assertion that they are everywhere, an assertion I wholeheartedly agree with, the scientific world refuses to see them.

I would like to have an opinion on something. In the October 10, 2004 New York Time's Book Review section Sally Satel critic's a new book entitled "The cult of Personality" by Annie Murphy Paul published by Free Press. The critic and the book seem to take a different view than you do; they see personality tests and the accent on Personality disorders as overdone in our society, especially when it comes to young people. The subtitle of the book goes: How Personality Tests Are Leading Us to Miseducate Our Children, Mismanage Our Companies, and Misunderstand Ourselves.

You write that, 'Narcissists are aided, abetted and facilitated by four types of people and institutions: the adulators, the blissfully ignorant, the self-deceiving and those deceived by the narcissist.' What category would you put the author and critic of the former book? The author is a former senior editor at Psychology Today and wants to get personality testing out of the courtroom, though she concedes there is room for narrow focused tests along with personal interviews.

Having read emails and postings on your web sites by people who have to go up against spouses who suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorders, and who are very good at manipulating people, I wonder if throwing out such tests would be like throwing out the baby with the bath water?

Sam:

Some criticism of the current orthodoxy, as represented by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), is justified.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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The classification of Axis II personality disorders - deeply ingrained, maladaptive, lifelong behavior patterns - in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, text revision [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] - or the DSM-IV-TR for short - has come under sustained and serious criticism from its inception in 1952.

The DSM IV-TR adopts a categorical approach, postulating that personality disorders are "*qualitatively distinct clinical syndromes*" (p. 689). This is widely doubted. Even the distinction made between "normal" and "disordered" personalities is increasingly being rejected. The "diagnostic thresholds" between normal and abnormal are either absent or weakly supported.

The polythetic form of the DSM's Diagnostic Criteria - only a subset of the criteria is adequate grounds for a diagnosis - generates unacceptable diagnostic heterogeneity. In other words, people diagnosed with the same personality disorder may share only one criterion or none.

The DSM fails to clarify the exact relationship between Axis II and Axis I disorders and the way chronic childhood and developmental problems interact with personality disorders.

The differential diagnoses are vague and the personality disorders are insufficiently demarcated. The result is excessive co-morbidity (multiple Axis II diagnoses).

The DSM contains little discussion of what distinguishes normal character (personality), personality traits, or personality style (Millon) - from personality disorders.

A dearth of documented clinical experience regarding both the disorders themselves and the utility of various treatment modalities.

Numerous personality disorders are "not otherwise specified" - a catchall, basket "category".

Cultural bias is evident in certain disorders (such as the Antisocial and the Schizotypal).

The emergence of dimensional alternatives to the categorical approach is acknowledged in the DSM-IV-TR itself:

“An alternative to the categorical approach is the dimensional perspective that Personality Disorders represent maladaptive variants of personality traits that merge imperceptibly into normality and into one another” (p.689)

The following issues - long neglected in the DSM - are likely to be tackled in future editions as well as in current research:

- The longitudinal course of the disorder(s) and their temporal stability from early childhood onwards;
- The genetic and biological underpinnings of personality disorder(s);
- The development of personality psychopathology during childhood and its emergence in adolescence;
- The interactions between physical health and disease and personality disorders;
- The effectiveness of various treatments - talk therapies as well as psychopharmacology.

All personality disorders are interrelated, at least phenomenologically - though we have no Grand Unifying Theory of Psychopathology. We do not know whether there are – and what are – the mechanisms underlying mental disorders. At best, mental health professionals record symptoms (as reported by the patient) and signs (as observed).

Then, they group them into syndromes and, more specifically, into disorders. This is descriptive, not explanatory science. Sure, there are a few etiological theories around (psychoanalysis, to mention the most famous) but they all failed to provide a coherent, consistent theoretical framework with predictive powers.

Patients suffering from personality disorders have many things in common:

1. Most of them are insistent (except those suffering from the Schizoid or the Avoidant Personality Disorders). They demand treatment on a preferential and privileged basis. They complain about numerous symptoms. They never obey the physician or his treatment recommendations and instructions.
2. They regard themselves as unique, display a streak of grandiosity and a diminished capacity for empathy (the ability to appreciate and respect the needs and wishes of other people). They regard the physician as inferior to them, alienate him using umpteen techniques and bore him with their never-ending self-preoccupation.
3. They are manipulative and exploitative because they trust no one and usually cannot love or share. They are socially maladaptive and emotionally unstable.
4. Most personality disorders start out as problems in personal development which peak during adolescence and then become personality disorders. They stay on as enduring qualities of the individual. Personality disorders are stable and all-pervasive – not episodic. They affect most of the areas of functioning of the patient: his career, his interpersonal relationships, his social functioning.

5. The typical patients is unhappy. He is depressed, suffers from auxiliary mood and anxiety disorders. He does not like himself, his character, his (deficient) functioning, or his (crippling) influence on others. But his defences are so strong, that he is aware only of the distress – and not of the reasons to it.
6. The patient with a personality disorder is vulnerable to and prone to suffer from a host of other psychiatric problems. It is as though his psychological immunological system has been disabled by his personality disorder and he falls prey to other variants of mental illness. So much energy is consumed by the disorder and by its corollaries (example: by obsessions-compulsions, or mood swings), that the patient is rendered defenceless.
7. Patients with personality disorders are alloplastic in their defences. They have an external locus of control. In other words: they tend to blame the outside world for their mishaps. In stressful situations, they try to pre-empt a (real or imaginary) threat, change the rules of the game, introduce new variables, or otherwise influence the world out there to conform to their needs. This is as opposed to autoplasic defences (internal locus of control) typical, for instance, of neurotics (who change their internal psychological processes in stressful situations).
8. The character problems, behavioural deficits and emotional deficiencies and lability encountered by patients with personality disorders are, mostly, ego-syntonic. This means that the patient does not, on the whole, find his personality traits or behaviour objectionable, unacceptable, disagreeable, or alien to his self. As opposed to that, neurotics are ego-dystonic: they do not like who they are and how they behave on a constant basis.
9. The personality-disordered are not psychotic. They have no hallucinations, delusions or thought disorders (except those who suffer from the Borderline Personality Disorder and who experience brief psychotic "microepisodes", mostly during treatment). They are also fully oriented, with clear senses (sensorium), good memory and a satisfactory general fund of knowledge.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] defines "personality" as:

"...enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself ... exhibited in a wide range of important social and personal contexts."

Click [here](#) to read the DSM-IV-TR (2000) definition of [personality disorders](#).

The international equivalent of the DSM is the ICD-10, Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders, published by the World Health Organization in Geneva (1992).

Click [here](#) to read the ICD-10 diagnostic criteria for the [personality disorders](#).

Each personality disorder has its own form of Narcissistic Supply:

- a. **HPD** (Histrionic PD) – Sex, seduction, "conquests", flirtation, romance, body-building, demanding physical regime;

- b. **NPD** (Narcissistic PD) – Adulation, admiration, attention, being feared;
- c. **BPD** (Borderline PD) – The presence of their mate or partner (they are terrified of abandonment);
- d. **AsPD** (Antisocial PD) – Money, power, control, fun.

Borderlines, for instance, can be described as narcissist with an overwhelming separation anxiety. They **DO** care deeply about not hurting others (though often they cannot help it) – but not out of empathy. There is a selfish motivation to avoid rejection. Borderlines depend on other people for emotional sustenance. A drug addict is unlikely to pick up a fight with his pusher. But Borderlines also have deficient impulse control, as do Antisocials. Hence their emotional lability, erratic behaviour, and the abuse they do heap on their nearest and dearest.

See also my article ["The Myth of Mental Illness"](#).

But you are right about the system's tendency to pathologize the victim.

It is telling that precious few psychology and psychopathology textbooks dedicate an entire chapter to abuse and violence. Even the most egregious manifestations – such as child sexual abuse – merit a fleeting mention, usually as a sub-chapter in a larger section dedicated to paraphilias or personality disorders.

Abusive behavior did not make it into the diagnostic criteria of mental health disorders, nor were its psychodynamic, cultural and social roots explored in depth. As a result of this deficient education and lacking awareness, most law enforcement officers, judges, counselors, guardians, and mediators are worryingly ignorant about the phenomenon.

Only 4% of hospital emergency room admissions of women in the United States are attributed by staff to domestic violence. The true figure, according to the FBI, is more like 50%. One in three murdered women was done in by her spouse, current or former.

The US Department of Justice pegs the number of spouses (mostly women) threatened with a deadly weapon at almost 2 million annually. Domestic violence erupts in a mind-boggling half of all American homes at least once a year. Nor are these isolated, "out of the blue", incidents.

Mistreatment and violence are part of an enduring pattern of maladaptive behavior within the relationship and are sometimes coupled with substance abuse. Abusers are possessive, pathologically jealous, dependent, and, often, narcissistic. Invariably, both the abuser and his victim seek to conceal the abusive episodes and their aftermath from family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

This dismal state of things is an abuser's and stalker's paradise. This is especially true with psychological (verbal and emotional) abuse which leaves no visible marks and renders the victim incapable of coherence.

Still, there is no "typical" offender. Maltreatment crosses racial, cultural, social, and economic lines. This is because, until very recently, abuse has constituted normative, socially-acceptable, and, sometimes, condoned, behavior. For the bulk of human history, women and children were considered no better than property.

Indeed, well into the 18th century, they still made it into lists of assets and liabilities of the household. Early legislation in America – fashioned after European law, both Anglo-Saxon and Continental – permitted wife battering for the purpose of behavior modification. The circumference of the stick used, specified the statute, should not exceed that of the husband's thumb.

Inevitably, many victims blame themselves for the dismal state of affairs. The abused party may have low self-esteem, a fluctuating sense of self-worth, primitive defense mechanisms, phobias, mental health problems, a disability, a history of failure, or a tendency to blame herself, or to feel inadequate (autoplatic neurosis).

She may have come from an abusive family or environment – which conditioned her to expect abuse as inevitable and "normal". In extreme and rare cases – the victim is a masochist, possessed of an urge to seek ill-treatment and pain. Gradually, the victims convert these unhealthy emotions and their learned helplessness in the face of persistent "gaslighting" into psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety and panic attacks, depression, or, in extremis, suicidal ideation and gestures.

From the [Narcissistic Personality Disorders list](#) – excerpt from my book *"Toxic Relationships – Abuse and its Aftermath"* (forthcoming, 2004):

Therapists, marriage counselors, mediators, court-appointed guardians, police officers, and judges are human. Some of them are social reactionaries, others are narcissists, and a few are themselves spouse abusers. Many things work against the victim facing the justice system and the psychological profession.

Start with denial. Abuse is such a horrid phenomenon that society and its delegates often choose to ignore it or to convert it into a more benign manifestation, typically by pathologizing the situation or the victim – rather than the perpetrator.

A man's home is still his castle and the authorities are loath to intrude.

Most abusers are men and most victims are women. Even the most advanced communities in the world are largely patriarchal. Misogynistic gender stereotypes, superstitions, and prejudices are strong.

Therapists are not immune to these ubiquitous and age-old influences and biases.

They are amenable to the considerable charm, persuasiveness, and manipulateness of the abuser and to his impressive thespian skills. The abuser offers a plausible rendition of the events and interprets them to his favor. The therapist rarely has a chance to witness an abusive exchange first hand and at close quarters. In contrast, the abused are often on the verge of a nervous breakdown: harassed, unkempt, irritable, impatient, abrasive, and hysterical.

Confronted with this contrast between a polished, self-controlled, and suave abuser and his harried casualties – it is easy to reach the conclusion that the real victim is the abuser, or that both parties abuse each other equally. The prey's acts of self-defense, assertiveness, or insistence on her rights are interpreted as aggression, lability, or a mental health problem.

The profession's propensity to pathologize extends to the wrongdoers as well. Alas, few therapists are equipped to do proper clinical work, including diagnosis.

Abusers are thought by practitioners of psychology to be emotionally disturbed, the twisted outcomes of a history of familial violence and childhood traumas. They are typically diagnosed as suffering from a personality disorder, an inordinately low self-esteem, or codependence coupled with an all-devouring fear of abandonment. Consummate abusers use the right vocabulary and feign the appropriate "emotions" and affect and, thus, sway the evaluator's judgment.

But while the victim's "pathology" works against her – especially in custody battles – the culprit's "illness" works for him, as a mitigating circumstance, especially in criminal proceedings.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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In his seminal essay, ["Understanding the Batterer in Visitation and Custody Disputes"](#), Lundy Bancroft sums up the asymmetry in favor of the offender:

"Batterers ... adopt the role of a hurt, sensitive man who doesn't understand how things got so bad and just wants to work it all out 'for the good of the children.' He may cry ... and use language that demonstrates considerable insight into his own feelings. He is likely to be skilled at explaining how other people have turned the victim against him, and how she is denying him access to the children as a form of revenge ... He commonly accuses her of having mental health problems, and may state that her family and friends agree with him ... that she is hysterical and that she is promiscuous. The abuser tends to be comfortable lying, having years of practice, and so can sound believable when making baseless statements. The abuser benefits ... when professionals believe that they can 'just tell' who is lying and who is telling the truth, and so fail to adequately investigate.

Because of the effects of trauma, the victim of battering will often seem hostile, disjointed, and agitated, while the abuser appears friendly, articulate, and calm. Evaluators are thus tempted to conclude that the victim is the source of the problems in the relationship."

There is little the victim can do to "educate" the therapist or "prove" to him who is the guilty party. Mental health professionals are as ego-centered as the next person. They are emotionally invested in opinions they form or in their interpretation of the abusive relationship. They perceive every disagreement as a challenge to their authority and are likely to pathologize such behavior, labeling it "resistance" (or worse).

In the process of mediation, marital therapy, or evaluation, counselors frequently propose various techniques to ameliorate the abuse or bring it under control. Woe betides the party that dares object or turn these "recommendations" down. Thus, an abuse victim who declines to have any further contact with her batterer – is bound to be chastised by her therapist for obstinately refusing to constructively communicate with her violent spouse.

Better to play ball and adopt the sleek mannerisms of your abuser. Sadly, sometimes the only way to convince your therapist that it is not all in your head and that you are a victim – is by being insincere and by staging a well-calibrated performance, replete with the correct vocabulary. Therapists have Pavlovian reactions to certain phrases and theories and to certain "presenting signs and symptoms" (behaviors during the first few sessions). Learn these – and use them to your advantage. It is your only chance.

Why do good people - church-goers, pillars of the community, the salt of the earth - ignore abuse and neglect, even when it is on their doorstep and in their proverbial backyard (for instance, in hospitals, orphanages, shelters, prisons, and the like)?

I. Lack of Clear Definition

Perhaps because the word "abuse" is so ill-defined and so open to culture-bound interpretation.

We should distinguish functional abuse from the sadistic variety. The former is calculated to ensure outcomes or to punish transgressors. It is measured, impersonal, efficient, and disinterested.

The latter - the sadistic variety - fulfils the emotional needs of the perpetrator.

This distinction is often blurred. People feel uncertain and, therefore, reluctant to intervene. "The authorities know best" - they lie to themselves.

II. Avoiding the Unpleasant

People, good people, tend to avert their eyes from certain institutions which deal with anomalies and pain, death and illness - the unsavory aspects of life which no one likes to be reminded of.

Like poor relatives, these institutions and events inside them are ignored and shunned.

III. The Common Guilt

Moreover, even good people abuse others habitually. Abusive conduct is so widespread that no one is exempt. Ours is a narcissistic - and, therefore, abusive - civilization.

People who find themselves caught up in anomic states - for instance, soldiers in war, nurses in hospitals, managers in corporations, parents or spouses in disintegrating families, or incarcerated inmates - tend to feel helpless and alienated. They experience a partial or total loss of control.

They are rendered vulnerable, powerless, and defenseless by events and circumstances beyond their influence.

Abuse amounts to exerting an absolute and all-pervasive domination of the victim's existence. It is a coping strategy employed by the abuser who wishes to reassert control over his life and, thus, to re-establish his mastery and superiority. By subjugating the victim - he regains his self-confidence and regulate his sense of self-worth.

IV. Abuse as Catharsis

Even perfectly "normal" and good people (witness the events in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq) channel their negative emotions - pent up aggression, humiliation, rage, envy, diffuse hatred - and displace them.

The victims of abuse become symbols of everything that's wrong in the abuser's life and the situation he finds himself caught in. The act of abuse amounts to misplaced and violent venting.

V. The Wish to Conform and Belong - The Ethics of Peer Pressure

Many "good people" perpetrate heinous acts - or refrain from criticizing or opposing evil - out of a wish to conform. Abusing others is their way of demonstrating obsequious obeisance to authority, group affiliation, collegueship, and adherence to the same ethical code of conduct and common values. They bask in the praise that is heaped on them by their superiors, fellow workers, associates, team mates, or collaborators.

Their need to belong is so strong that it overpowers ethical, moral, or legal considerations. They remain silent in the face of neglect, abuse, and atrocities because they feel insecure and they derive their identity almost entirely from the group.

Abuse rarely occurs where it does not have the sanction and blessing of the authorities, whether local or national. A permissive environment is sine qua non. The more abnormal the circumstances, the less normative the milieu, the further the scene of the crime is from public scrutiny - the more is egregious abuse likely to occur. This acquiescence is especially true in totalitarian societies where the use of physical force to discipline or eliminate dissent is an acceptable practice. But, unfortunately, it is also rampant in democratic societies.

Letter no 3 November 1, 2004

Dear Sam,

We had agreed to keep out any personal experiences in our exchanges, but it is very hard to intellectualize, at least for me, my interactions with narcissistic people and NPDs. So I hope

you will allow me to temporize, to talk about two experiences that illustrate how difficult it is to communicate with other people, especially NPDs. Not being a psychiatrist I cannot make a legitimate diagnosis.

Sam:

Don't worry about it. You are in good company. Though first proposed by Freud in 1915, the construct of [pathological narcissism](#) didn't make it into the DSM - the bible of the psychiatric profession in North America - until 1980! Even now, the ICD-10, published by the World Health Organization (WHO), and used throughout the rest of the world, contains no separate mental health diagnosis of narcissism! As far as Europe, Asia, and Africa are concerned, NPD still does not exist!

Moreover, narcissism is still very difficult to diagnose, even by seasoned professionals. In many cases, it is [comorbid with other mental health disorders](#). Often, [Asperger's Disorder](#) and [Bipolar I](#) are misdiagnosed as NPD!!!

Stephen:

Now I have no idea if the two people I am going to mention suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or not. They may have been having a bad day, week or year. As they were women, it could be blamed on PMS or the moon, but I hate to dismiss women in that manner, and think they are equal to men, and equally responsible for their actions.

The first incident took place years ago. I was a student and this woman and I socialized in class. I thought there was a Platonic relationship developing, or at least camaraderie, but instead she told me she could tell by my "non-verbal" communication that I liked her, and even more. After inviting her to my home for a party of friends, so that she could meet my wife and son, she persisted in this strange obsession with me. I finally told her where to get off, and essentially told her she was a liar.

Now, years later, she has published a book on how to tell if people are lying. I have not read it, but during a TV interview she read parts of it, and in the final pages she had written that people begin lying by lying to themselves.

How true. It gave me some satisfaction that I might have inspired the book, though I doubt it, and that maybe she had gained some 'self-reflexivity'.

For all I know, she may be following the same behaviors with other people.

Now in her case, and with some hindsight, I wonder if she did not suffer from 'border line personality' disorder. Such cases tend to be self-disillusioned; they think people who are kind to them are in reality in love with them. They then reject people they are involved with. They play a sort of love-hate dance, with the refrain playing in the background of, "I love you, go away." The actress Glen Close played a 'border line' in the 1987 movie, Fatal Attraction.

Sam:

Narcissists are often self-delusional.

Don't get me wrong, I think that confabulations are an important part of life. They serve to heal emotional wounds or to prevent ones from being inflicted in the first place. They prop-up the confabulator's self-esteem, regulate his (or her) sense of self-worth, and buttress his (or her) self-image. They serve as organizing principles in social interactions.

Father's wartime heroism, mother's youthful good looks, one's oft-recounted exploits, erstwhile alleged brilliance, and past purported sexual irresistibility - are typical examples of white, fuzzy, heart-warming lies wrapped around a shriveled kernel of truth.

But the distinction between reality and fantasy is rarely completely lost. Deep inside, the healthy confabulator knows where facts end and wishful thinking takes over. Father acknowledges he was no war hero, though he did his share of fighting. Mother understands she was no ravishing beauty, though she may have been attractive. The confabulator realizes that his recounted exploits are overblown, his brilliance exaggerated, and his sexual irresistibility a myth.

Such distinctions never rise to the surface because everyone - the confabulator and his audience alike - have a common interest to maintain the confabulation. To challenge the integrity of the confabulator or the veracity of his confabulations is to threaten the very fabric of family and society. Human intercourse is built around such entertaining deviations from the truth.

This is where the narcissist differs from others (from "normal" people).

His very self is a piece of fiction concocted to fend off hurt and to nurture the narcissist's grandiosity. He fails in his "reality test" - the ability to distinguish the actual from the imagined. The narcissist fervently believes in his own infallibility, brilliance, omnipotence, heroism, and perfection. He doesn't dare confront the truth and admit it even to himself.

Moreover, he imposes his personal mythology on his nearest and dearest. Spouse, children, colleagues, friends, neighbors - sometimes even perfect strangers - must abide by the narcissist's narrative or face his wrath. The narcissist countenances no disagreement, alternative points of view, or criticism. To him, confabulation *IS* reality.

The coherence of the narcissist's dysfunctional and precariously-balanced personality depends on the plausibility of his stories and on their acceptance by his Sources of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist invests an inordinate time in substantiating his tales, collecting "evidence", defending his version of events, and in re-interpreting reality to fit his scenario. As a result, most narcissists are self-delusional, obstinate, opinionated, and argumentative.

The narcissist's lies are not goal-orientated. This is what makes his constant dishonesty both disconcerting and incomprehensible. The narcissist lies at the drop of a hat, needlessly, and almost ceaselessly. He lies in order to avoid the Grandiosity Gap - when the abyss between fact and (narcissistic) fiction becomes too gaping to ignore.

The narcissist lies in order to preserve appearances, uphold fantasies, support the tall (and impossible) tales of his False Self and extract Narcissistic Supply from unsuspecting sources, who are not yet on to him. To the narcissist, confabulation is not merely a way of life - but life itself.

We are all conditioned to let other indulge in pet delusions and get away with white, not too egregious, lies. The narcissist makes use of our socialization. We dare not confront or expose him, despite the outlandishness of his claims, the improbability of his stories, the implausibility of his alleged accomplishments and conquests. We simply turn the other cheek, or meekly avert our eyes, often embarrassed.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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Moreover, the narcissist makes clear, from the very beginning, that it is his way or the highway. His aggression - even violent streak - are close to the surface. He may be charming in a first encounter - but even then there are [telltale signs](#) of pent-up abuse. His interlocutors sense this impending threat and avoid conflict by acquiescing with the narcissist's fairy tales. Thus he imposes his private universe and virtual reality on his milieu - sometimes with disastrous consequences.

There is another possibility. She may be an erotomaniac. If I am right and she is, you are one lucky target. It often takes years to shake off an erotomaniac stalker. Telling them off is never enough.

On the other hand, maybe she isn't so pathological. Simply a lonely, narcissistic, and self-deluded personality. As you correctly observe, in my view, Borderline is also a strong possibility.

The erotomaniac stalker believes that she is in love with you. To show her keen interest, she keeps calling you, dropping by, writing e-mails, doing unsolicited errands "on your behalf", talking to your friends, co-workers, and family, and, in general, making herself available at all times. The erotomaniac feels free to make for you legal, financial, and emotional decisions and to commit you without your express consent or even knowledge.

The erotomaniac intrudes on your privacy, does not respect your express wishes and personal boundaries and ignores your emotions, needs, and preferences. To her, "love" means enmeshment and clinging coupled with an overpowering separation anxiety (fear of being abandoned). She may even force herself upon you sexually.

Moreover, no amount of denials, chastising, threats, and even outright hostile actions will convince the erotomaniac that you are not in love with her. This is why I am not sure about your case.

The erotomaniac knows better and will make you see the light as well. You are simply unaware of what is good for you, divorced as you are from your emotions. The erotomaniac determinedly sees it as her task to bring life and happiness into your dreary existence.

Thus, regardless of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the erotomaniac is convinced that her feelings are reciprocated - in other words, that you are equally in love with her. The erotomaniac stalker interprets everything you do (or refrain from doing) as [coded messages](#) confessing to and conveying your eternal devotion to her and to your "relationship".

Erotomaniacs are socially-inapt, awkward, [schizoid](#), and suffer from a host of mood and anxiety disorders. They may also be people with whom you have been involved romantically (e.g., your former spouse, a former boyfriend, a one night stand) - or otherwise (for instance, colleagues or co-workers). They are driven by their all-consuming loneliness and all-pervasive fantasies.

Consequently, erotomaniacs react badly to any perceived rejection by their victims. They turn on a dime and become dangerously [vindictive](#), out to destroy the source of their mounting frustration - you. When the "relationship" looks hopeless, many erotomaniacs turn to violence in a spree of self-destruction. This hasn't been the case here.

Stephen:

One comment on a message board about the character she plays goes like this:

Jeez Alex why would you want a sleaze like him anyway? LOL.

Obviously she was suffering from some mental disorder because there is no other way to explain such extreme behavior after just a weekend fling. I mean, I could almost see how she could become attached if she was sleeping with him for years and there was some emotional involvement but after 2 days?

I do believe the character had borderline personality disorder in that she displayed all the obvious characteristics like over reaction to rejection and the "I hate you- don't leave me" personality type. Even though she was a mess, I felt sorry for her in that I don't think she could control her reaction to him dumping her after the fling.

Myself personally, I could never pursue someone who didn't want me. It's just so pathetic. I cringed every time she called his house and stalked him because it was just making her look worse and worse to him. She should have realized he was "happily" married and didn't want to be with her and she should have walked away- but hey- she was psychotic. It was not something she could control.

If I had a quarter for every married man that hit on me in bar I'd be rich. LOL.

From L. (identity reserved)

My question to you is how can one differentiate between say a NPD, a Borderline and an Inverted Narcissist? The Axis II disorders, according to one of your web pages, are very much alike? But how so, and to what degree? Should we put them all into the same kettle of fish?

Sam:

This is one case where discarding the fish together with the kettle may be a great idea (laughing).

Seriously now: the classification of Axis II personality disorders - deeply ingrained, maladaptive, lifelong behavior patterns - in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, text revision [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] - or the DSM-IV-TR for short - has come under sustained and serious criticism from its inception in 1952.

The DSM IV-TR adopts a categorical approach, postulating that personality disorders are *"qualitatively distinct clinical syndromes"* (p. 689). This is widely doubted. Even the distinction made between "normal" and "disordered" personalities is increasingly being rejected. The "diagnostic thresholds" between normal and abnormal are either absent or weakly supported.

The polythetic form of the DSM's Diagnostic Criteria - only a subset of the criteria is adequate grounds for a diagnosis - generates unacceptable diagnostic heterogeneity. In other words, people diagnosed with the same personality disorder may share only one criterion or none.

The DSM fails to clarify the exact relationship between Axis II and Axis I disorders and the way chronic childhood and developmental problems interact with personality disorders.

The differential diagnoses are vague and the personality disorders are insufficiently demarcated. The result is excessive co-morbidity (multiple Axis II diagnoses).

The DSM contains little discussion of what distinguishes normal character (personality), personality traits, or personality style (Millon) - from personality disorders.

A dearth of documented clinical experience regarding both the disorders themselves and the utility of various treatment modalities.

Numerous personality disorders are "not otherwise specified" - a catchall, basket "category".

Cultural bias is evident in certain disorders (such as the Antisocial and the Schizotypal).

The emergence of dimensional alternatives to the categorical approach is acknowledged in the DSM-IV-TR itself:

"An alternative to the categorical approach is the dimensional perspective that Personality Disorders represent maladaptive variants of personality traits that merge imperceptibly into normality and into one another" (p.689)

The following issues - long neglected in the DSM - are likely to be tackled in future editions as well as in current research:

- The longitudinal course of the disorder(s) and their temporal stability from early childhood onwards;
- The genetic and biological underpinnings of personality disorder(s);
- The development of personality psychopathology during childhood and its emergence in adolescence;
- The interactions between physical health and disease and personality disorders;
- The effectiveness of various treatments - talk therapies as well as psychopharmacology.

All personality disorders are interrelated, at least phenomenologically - though we have no Grand Unifying Theory of Psychopathology. We do not know whether there are – and what are – the mechanisms underlying mental disorders. At best, mental health professionals record symptoms (as reported by the patient) and signs (as observed).

Then, they group them into syndromes and, more specifically, into disorders. This is descriptive, not explanatory science. Sure, there are a few etiological theories around (psychoanalysis, to mention the most famous) but they all failed to provide a coherent, consistent theoretical framework with predictive powers.

Patients suffering from ALL personality disorders have so many things in common that the differential diagnoses look forced and artificial:

1. Most of these patients are insistent (except those suffering from the Schizoid or the Avoidant Personality Disorders). They demand treatment on a preferential and privileged basis. They complain about numerous symptoms. They never obey the physician or his treatment recommendations and instructions.
2. They regard themselves as unique, display a streak of grandiosity and a diminished capacity for empathy (the ability to appreciate and respect the needs and wishes of other people). They regard the physician as inferior to them, alienate him using umpteen techniques and bore him with their never-ending self-preoccupation.
3. They are manipulative and exploitative because they trust no one and usually cannot love or share. They are socially maladaptive and emotionally unstable.
4. Most personality disorders start out as problems in personal development which peak during adolescence and then become personality disorders. They stay on as enduring qualities of the individual. Personality disorders are stable and all-pervasive – not episodic. They affect most of the areas of functioning of the patient: his career, his interpersonal relationships, his social functioning.
5. The typical patients is unhappy. He is depressed, suffers from auxiliary mood and anxiety disorders. He does not like himself, his character, his (deficient) functioning, or his (crippling) influence on others. But his defences are so strong, that he is aware only of the distress – and not of the reasons to it.

6. The patient with a personality disorder is vulnerable to and prone to suffer from a host of other psychiatric problems. It is as though his psychological immunological system has been disabled by his personality disorder and he falls prey to other variants of mental illness. So much energy is consumed by the disorder and by its corollaries (example: by obsessions-compulsions, or mood swings), that the patient is rendered defenceless.
7. Patients with personality disorders are alloplastic in their defences. They have an external locus of control. In other words: they tend to blame the outside world for their mishaps. In stressful situations, they try to pre-empt a (real or imaginary) threat, change the rules of the game, introduce new variables, or otherwise influence the world out there to conform to their needs. This is as opposed to autoplasic defences (internal locus of control) typical, for instance, of neurotics (who change their internal psychological processes in stressful situations).
8. The character problems, behavioural deficits and emotional deficiencies and lability encountered by patients with personality disorders are, mostly, ego-syntonic. This means that the patient does not, on the whole, find his personality traits or behaviour objectionable, unacceptable, disagreeable, or alien to his self. As opposed to that, neurotics are ego-dystonic: they do not like who they are and how they behave on a constant basis.
9. The personality-disordered are not psychotic. They have no hallucinations, delusions or thought disorders (except those who suffer from the Borderline Personality Disorder and who experience brief psychotic "microepisodes", mostly during treatment). They are also fully oriented, with clear senses (sensorium), good memory and a satisfactory general fund of knowledge.

Stephen:

The notion of imbrication is one that seems to apply to the intermeshing of narcissists (and other personality disorders) with "normal" people. Imbroglia, embed, quagmire all are words that apply to their interpersonal relationships.

Do all of the Axis II disorders have a weak boundary between themselves and others? Are they all "needy" in the manner of needing others to confirm their existence? Let me give you another example of what I mean in the history of Miss X.

Miss X

Now I would like to talk about another situation that has occurred to me. Let me just say that Miss X was a woman friend who was intelligent and a pleasure to be around. She always had a tendency to be bossy, but this was overshadowed by a charming playfulness.

Yet I had my doubts about her "personality." She was inordinately attuned to the "important people" around her, always losing interest in our conversation whenever a very expensive car or a supposedly famous person walked by. She also put her male boyfriends into a want add list of fireman, policeman, airplane pilot, ski instructor, etc. And she referred to them as such when discussing them, never by name - she objectified men.

Over the past months she has become more bitter and aggressive towards me, and I finally dropped her as a friend. My own life experiences have been positive for the last months and I have been traveling and meeting new people. Miss X appeared to be jealous of all this, and was cold towards me, refusing to see me as she was too busy. In our last encounter, I had invited her to walk in the park and talk. When I picked her up I told her that I was a bit peeved, as I had just dropped one of my cameras and was worried that it was broken. She said something flippant about how I always purchased expensive toys. I drove her to a glass shop where I had a glass cut for a photo print; she insisted I put the print in right away even though the glass shop technician told me I should clean the glass first. I tried to ignore her even more insistent commands, especially when I was driving (this was nothing new, as she always was bossy as a passenger, telling me where to turn etc.).

The beginning of the end was when I was looking for a parking place in a public park, and the entrance was blocked because they were making a film. She accused me of not having balls to just barge past and park. I told her I had brains instead of balls, and she went on to make several sarcastic remarks about men and their balls and brains. When I did find a place to park, in the next parking lot, she accused me of parking over the line and insisted I re-park my car; I did so scrapping the front of my car. As I was putting money in the parking meter, and trying to cool down, she went into the back of my car, and grabbed my dog to take it out (something she had never done before, and something only I do.) When I told her to never do that again after telling her to take her hands off my dog, she told me she was "only trying to help." At this point I told her that we needed to talk, but she became belligerent, and told me I was, "weird." Seeing that things were getting worse and not better, I told her that our friendship was at an end, and that I doubted any talking could repair it, and I told her that if she treated her friends the way she treated me, that she would certainly not have many. Miss X became more abusive and loud, telling me she had lots of friends. I told her good, and took my dog and walked away. My temper was at the breaking point and I did not trust her nor her intelligence. For good reason.

A year ago, she had phoned me up asking me to go with her to attack a woman's car because she had gotten into some altercation over a parking spot. I had told her to grow up and that under no circumstances would I take part in such a prank that was probably illegal, if not irrational. If she felt so strongly about it, I suggested she call a telephone number where you report people who drive badly, and the police or authorities would handle this situation.

In hindsight, I probably kept this friendship going out of pity and hopefulness. But I had noticed that towards the end of the friendship, in the last months, every time I talked to her she was very negative, toxic and accused me of being rude to people (while she was very rude). This double standard is something I have seen with NPD's. They feel that they can say and do anything while you have to toe the line; it doesn't start immediately because they have to charm you into believing they are nice people. The point where I subconsciously decided to end it was when I had asked her favor and she just brushed me off.

I had to tell her all about the many times I had done things for her, gone out the way to be nice, and she finally and reluctantly agreed to help me.

Manipulative people are very hard to spot, most of the time, because they are good at hypnotizing you with their smile and winning ways. I prefer the French who are nasty to your face, and only will be nice to you if they really like you; the North American razzle dazzle make nice social climate is nice but superficial. I feel that it is because of this superficial

niceness, this adherence to social convention of politeness that we get involved with bad people.

Unfortunately they cannot have a label, saying 'Hi I'm Samantha and a pain in the ass', or 'Hi, I'm Sam a real jerk.' It would all be so much simpler. Of course we are to blame as well, because the NPDs and jerks are fine tuned to see the people who have those invisible signs that say, "Hi, I'm just waiting to be taken advantage of, so kick me and see." As P.T. Barnum would say, "there's a sucker born every minute."

Sam:

Hi, I am Sam, I am a real jerk (laughing). Talk about Freudian slips ...:o))

I want to relate to the latter part of your ordeal with Miss X (charming epithet, by the way...:o))

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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The narcissist is confident that people find him irresistible. His unfailing charm is part of his self-imputed omnipotence. This inane conviction is what makes the narcissist a "*pathological charmer*". The somatic narcissist and the histrionic flaunt their sex appeal, virility or femininity, sexual prowess, musculature, physique, training, or athletic achievements.

The cerebral narcissist seeks to enchant and entrance his audience with intellectual pyrotechnics. Many narcissists brag about their wealth, health, possessions, collections, spouses, children, personal history, family tree – in short: anything that garners them attention and renders them alluring.

Both types of narcissists firmly believe that being unique, they are entitled to special treatment by others. They deploy their "charm offensives" to manipulate their nearest and dearest (or even complete strangers) and use them as instruments of gratification. Exerting personal magnetism and charisma become ways of asserting control and obviating other people's personal boundaries.

The pathological charmer feels superior to the person he captivates and fascinates. To him, charming someone means having power over her, controlling her, or even subjugating her. It is all a mind game intertwined with a power play. The person to be thus enthralled is an object, a mere prop, and of dehumanized utility.

In some cases, pathological charm involves more than a grain of sadism. It provokes in the narcissist sexual arousal by inflicting the "pain" of subjugation on the beguiled who "cannot help" but be enchanted. Conversely, the pathological charmer engages in infantile magical thinking. He uses charm to help maintain object constancy and fend off abandonment – in other words, to ensure that the person he "bewitched" won't disappear on him.

Pathological charmers react with rage and aggression when their intended targets prove to be impervious and resistant to their lure. This kind of narcissistic injury – being spurned and rebuffed – makes them feel threatened, rejected, and denuded. Being ignored amounts to a challenge to their uniqueness, entitlement, control, and superiority. Narcissists wither without constant Narcissistic Supply. When their charm fails to elicit it – they feel annulled, non-existent, and "dead".

Expectedly, they go to great lengths to secure said supply. It is only when their efforts are frustrated that the mask of civility and congeniality drops and reveals the true face of the narcissist – a predator on the prowl.

More generally, I harbor this grandiose conviction that many mental health disorders are rooted in pathological narcissism.

To my mind, all Cluster B personality disorders, for instance, have their own forms of [Narcissistic Supply](#):

- a. **HPD** (Histrionic PD) – Sex, seduction, "conquests", flirtation, romance, body-building, demanding physical regime;
- b. **NPD** (Narcissistic PD) – Adulation, admiration, attention, being feared;
- c. **BPD** (Borderline PD) – The presence of their mate or partner (they are terrified of abandonment);
- d. **AsPD** (Antisocial PD) – Money, power, control, fun.

Borderlines, for example, can be described as narcissist with an overwhelming separation anxiety. They **DO** care deeply about not hurting others (though often they cannot help it) – but not out of empathy. Theirs is a selfish motivation to avoid rejection. Borderlines depend on other people for emotional sustenance. A drug addict is unlikely to pick up a fight with his pusher. But Borderlines also have deficient impulse control, as do Antisocials. Hence their emotional lability, erratic behaviour, and the abuse they do heap on their nearest and dearest.

Friday, November 5, 2004, fourth letter to Sam

Dear Sam,

I think we have hit our stride. I don't know if anyone reads these letters, but they certainly let me let off some steam in a constructive way, instead of destructive manner. In fact that is what I would like to talk about in this letter. A TV producer who had chanced upon my web site contacted me recently. We talked over the phone and she wanted to know how I had

suffered from dealing with NPDs. I tried to answer as best I could but felt a lump in my throat of self-pity. Thinking about the pain and trauma brings back the pain and trauma.

So instead I started to wonder how I could illustrate what narcissists' actions do to people. In order to do so, I think a division has to be made between ordinary people and people who are apt to suffer from co-dependency or victimhood.

An ordinary person who meets a narcissist will find them to be marvelous and exciting people, and narcissists will work at being just that, projecting an aura of power, sex, intellect or whatever, to lure in their victim/supply. Now (I hate using now but it is a way of saying wake up and smell the coffee as Oprah likes to say) we all like to put our best foot forward. How many people go and insult someone, or tell him or her what he or she really feels about the person he or she just met or even old friends? It is not in human nature to be truthful (or at least to tell white lies). How then is a narcissist different? Do you hear that sucking sound, that is their black hole of an ego drawing you into their world where they will then manipulate and play with you. It can be a small sucking sound or a tornado depending on the individual narcissist and how they are feeling that day. On off days, a narcissist will be a bit cranky, but when they hit their stride, Casey lower the boom! So the ordinary person, if they don't suspect anything abnormal, will say, "Gee whiz, what a nice person!" And the narcissist will draw them slowly into their web of lies and deceit.

Most normal people have the option of walking away at this point. Like the one that got away, narcissists don't always get a bite on their lure as they fish for victims. In some cases, the narcissist will place themselves in such a position of power so that they force people to pay attention to them, and the narcissist can "play" with the normal person knowing full well they have this power over another. In social situations, the normal person can walk away but in work or in a situation where there is a need to obtain something from the narcissist, then the dyad is in place. Unwittingly, normal people can cooperate with narcissists. I could give you lots of cases of this, but the more dramatic ones make a bigger impact. Ted Bundy was defended by his fellow students and teachers when he was accused of rape in Colorado. He escaped to Florida where he went on a rampage of killing.

Another rapist killer in Houston who they calculate sometimes took only 15 seconds to find and kill his victims is soon to be paroled. The system was used by this monster and no one seems to want to stand up and say, no way José is this monster going to be let loose to kill again! In Canada a young couple drugged, tortured and killed young girls. The wife pleaded that her husband had abused her, but later evidence contradicted her story. Soon she will be released because normal people believed her, even now the prison psychologists say she has shown no remorse for allegedly helping rape and kill her own sister! All of this is on video tape, by the way. But there is a blind spot on Canadian culture that prevents it from looking at itself - does this sound familiar?

Now victims who are predisposed to be used by narcissists react two different ways.

They either immediately bond with the NPD, without the need for a long drawn out seduction, or they react violently or refuse the narcissist's advances. I saw the later reaction in someone I know and we finally analyzed it as revulsion towards the primary narcissist in their lives, who they could not leave because of co-dependency, even when they saw in another person the same type of actions and seduction. Once the victim is locked into a

narcissist-victim dyad/couple, then it takes years of therapy or death to rid the victim of this dependency. Why dependency?

You and others have called Narcissistic Supply what a victim give the narcissist: attention, subjugation, submission, adoration etc. The victim must also have some kind of satisfaction from being the supplier? How can we not see this in the adulation of stars and even politicians? Is there something in the human brain that is triggered by the narcissist? In dogs, the leader is adulated and followed around, and the lower pack members find this satisfying, as if they are puppies and the alphas are the mother and father. Is this then the reason? I call the narcissist a big child, but when he or she bullies and commands others, the group they are in may see them as being mature and powerful. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. As always.

In both cases of victimhood, either the transitory one of the normal person and the more long term or imbricated one of the victim, can we speak of "pain and suffering"? In Europe and especially France the concept of emotional harassment in the work place has gained acceptance. At the same time in France a crime de passion, where someone goes crazy temporarily - even a Narcissistic Rage episode, is still accepted as a defense for someone who has committed murder. The crime of passion in France is normal, as they are a passionate people, or so they say. Statistics from Durex condoms point to a lot of passion. Back to harassment or 'harcèlement' as the French call it. They have established certain norms of behavior that constitute behavior that is toxic to the worker.

If we consider the toxic nature of pain and suffering, I think we are firmer ground. A toxic substance will eventually lead to death. In other words, the narcissist is trying to kill people with his or her behavior - to put it bluntly. If we look at larger than life psychotic narcissists like Adolph Hitler then it becomes obvious what this means. The total control of a dictator or a narcissist means every one is an extension to be cut off, or destroyed if found lacking. The self-hate of a narcissist ends up being transferred to the other, and the other is you and I. Am I right Sam? Or is this an overstatement?

Sam:

We discussed the dyad that the narcissist forms with his victim at length in our [second dialogue](#).

Still, I would like to add a few aspects and dimensions to this abnormal - yet often protracted and seemingly mutually gratifying! - interaction of predator and prey.

Like you, I believe that narcissism is a clarion call. The narcissists responds to and resonates with the deepest emotional needs of his hapless victims. The healthier the potential prey, the more he or she are able to resist the narcissist's lure.

Sharing one's life with a narcissist is often akin to undergoing torture - it has the same psychodynamic outcomes, even if the abuse is merely verbal or emotional.

Let me explain what I mean. I draw a parallel between one's physiological body and one's private spaces (home, family, workplace). Violating the latter is very much like violating the former.

There is one place in which one's privacy, intimacy, integrity and inviolability are guaranteed – one's body, a unique temple and a familiar territory of sense and personal history. The torturer invades, defiles and desecrates this shrine. He does so publicly, deliberately, repeatedly and, often, sadistically and sexually, with undisguised pleasure. Hence the all-pervasive, long-lasting, and, frequently, irreversible effects and outcomes of torture.

In a way, the torture victim's own body is rendered his worse enemy. It is corporeal agony that compels the sufferer to mutate, his identity to fragment, his ideals and principles to crumble. The body becomes an accomplice of the tormentor, an uninterrupted channel of communication, a treasonous, poisoned territory.

It fosters a humiliating dependency of the abused on the perpetrator. Bodily needs denied – sleep, toilet, food, water – are wrongly perceived by the victim as the direct causes of his degradation and dehumanization. As he sees it, he is rendered bestial not by the sadistic bullies around him but by his own flesh.

As I said, the concept of "body" can easily be extended to "family", or "home". Torture is often applied to kin and kith, compatriots, or colleagues. This intends to disrupt the continuity of "surroundings, habits, appearance, relations with others", as the CIA put it in one of its manuals. A sense of cohesive self-identity depends crucially on the familiar and the continuous. By attacking both one's biological body and one's "social body", the victim's psyche is strained to the point of dissociation.

Beatrice Patsalides describes this transmogrification thus in "Ethics of the Unspeakable: Torture Survivors in Psychoanalytic Treatment":

"As the gap between the 'I' and the 'me' deepens, dissociation and alienation increase. The subject that, under torture, was forced into the position of pure object has lost his or her sense of interiority, intimacy, and privacy. Time is experienced now, in the present only, and perspective – that which allows for a sense of relativity – is foreclosed. Thoughts and dreams attack the mind and invade the body as if the protective skin that normally contains our thoughts, gives us space to breathe in between the thought and the thing being thought about, and separates between inside and outside, past and present, me and you, was lost."

Torture robs the victim of the most basic modes of relating to reality and, thus, is the equivalent of cognitive death. Space and time are warped by sleep deprivation. The self ("I") is shattered. The tortured have nothing familiar to hold on to: family, home, personal belongings, loved ones, language, name. Gradually, they lose their mental resilience and sense of freedom. They feel alien – unable to communicate, relate, attach, or empathize with others.

Torture splinters early childhood grandiose narcissistic fantasies of uniqueness, omnipotence, invulnerability, and impenetrability. But it enhances the fantasy of merger with an idealized and omnipotent (though not benign) other – the inflicter of agony. The twin processes of individuation and separation are reversed.

Which leads back to your observations - to the peculiar and powerful bond between abuser and abused.

The Stockholm Syndrome

Torture is the ultimate act of perverted intimacy. The torturer invades the victim's body, pervades his psyche, and possesses his mind. Deprived of contact with others and starved for human interactions, the prey bonds with the predator. "Traumatic bonding", akin to the Stockholm Syndrome, is about hope and the search for meaning in the brutal and indifferent and nightmarish universe of the torture cell.

The abuser becomes the black hole at the center of the victim's surrealistic galaxy, sucking in the sufferer's universal need for solace. The victim tries to "control" his tormentor by becoming one with him (introjecting him) and by appealing to the monster's presumably dormant humanity and empathy.

This bonding is especially strong when the torturer and the tortured form a dyad and "collaborate" in the rituals and acts of torture (for instance, when the victim is coerced into selecting the torture implements and the types of torment to be inflicted, or to choose between two evils).

The psychologist Shirley Spitz offers this powerful overview of the contradictory nature of torture in a seminar titled "The Psychology of Torture" (1989):

"Torture is an obscenity in that it joins what is most private with what is most public. Torture entails all the isolation and extreme solitude of privacy with none of the usual security embodied therein... Torture entails at the same time all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibilities for camaraderie or shared experience. (The presence of an all powerful other with whom to merge, without the security of the other's benign intentions.)

A further obscenity of torture is the inversion it makes of intimate human relationships. The interrogation is a form of social encounter in which the normal rules of communicating, of relating, of intimacy are manipulated. Dependency needs are elicited by the interrogator, but not so they may be met as in close relationships, but to weaken and confuse. Independence that is offered in return for 'betrayal' is a lie. Silence is intentionally misinterpreted either as confirmation of information or as guilt for 'complicity'.

Torture combines complete humiliating exposure with utter devastating isolation. The final products and outcome of torture are a scarred and often shattered victim and an empty display of the fiction of power."

Obsessed by endless ruminations, demented by pain and a continuum of sleeplessness – the victim regresses, shedding all but the most primitive defense mechanisms: splitting, narcissism, dissociation, Projective Identification, introjection, and cognitive dissonance. The victim constructs an alternative world, often suffering from depersonalization and derealization, hallucinations, ideas of reference, delusions, and psychotic episodes.

Sometimes the victim comes to crave pain – very much as self-mutilators do – because it is a proof and a reminder of his individuated existence otherwise blurred by the incessant torture. Pain shields the sufferer from disintegration and capitulation. It preserves the veracity of his unthinkable and unspeakable experiences.

This dual process of the victim's alienation and addiction to anguish complements the perpetrator's view of his quarry as "inhuman", or "subhuman". The torturer assumes the

position of the sole authority, the exclusive fount of meaning and interpretation, the source of both evil and good.

Torture is about reprogramming the victim to succumb to an alternative exegesis of the world, proffered by the abuser. It is an act of deep, indelible, traumatic indoctrination. The abused also swallows whole and assimilates the torturer's negative view of him and often, as a result, is rendered suicidal, self-destructive, or self-defeating.

Thus, torture has no cut-off date. The sounds, the voices, the smells, the sensations reverberate long after the episode has ended – both in nightmares and in waking moments. The victim's ability to trust other people – i.e., to assume that their motives are at least rational, if not necessarily benign – has been irrevocably undermined. Social institutions are perceived as precariously poised on the verge of an ominous, Kafkaesque mutation. Nothing is either safe, or credible anymore.

Victims typically react by undulating between emotional numbing and increased arousal: insomnia, irritability, restlessness, and attention deficits. Recollections of the traumatic events intrude in the form of dreams, night terrors, flashbacks, and distressing associations.

The tortured develop compulsive rituals to fend off obsessive thoughts. Other psychological sequelae reported include cognitive impairment, reduced capacity to learn, memory disorders, sexual dysfunction, social withdrawal, inability to maintain long-term relationships, or even mere intimacy, phobias, ideas of reference and superstitions, delusions, hallucinations, psychotic microepisodes, and emotional flatness.

Depression and anxiety are very common. These are forms and manifestations of self-directed aggression. The sufferer rages at his own victimhood and resulting multiple dysfunction. He feels shamed by his new disabilities and responsible, or even guilty, somehow, for his predicament and the dire consequences borne by his nearest and dearest. His sense of self-worth and self-esteem are crippled.

In a nutshell, torture victims suffer from a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their strong feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame are also typical of victims of childhood abuse, domestic violence, and rape. They feel anxious because the perpetrator's behavior is seemingly arbitrary and unpredictable – or mechanically and inhumanly regular.

They feel guilty and disgraced because, to restore a semblance of order to their shattered world and a modicum of dominion over their chaotic life, they need to transform themselves into the cause of their own degradation and the accomplices of their tormentors.

The CIA, in its "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual – 1983" (reprinted in the April 1997 issue of Harper's Magazine), summed up the theory of coercion thus:

"The purpose of all coercive techniques is to induce psychological regression in the subject by bringing a superior outside force to bear on his will to resist. Regression is basically a loss of autonomy, a reversion to an earlier behavioral level. As the subject regresses, his learned personality traits fall away in reverse chronological order. He begins to lose the capacity to carry out the highest creative activities, to deal with complex situations, or to cope with stressful interpersonal relationships or repeated frustrations."

Inevitably, in the aftermath of torture, its victims feel helpless and powerless. This loss of control over one's life and body is manifested physically in impotence, attention deficits, and insomnia. This is often exacerbated by the disbelief many torture victims encounter, especially if they are unable to produce scars, or other "objective" proof of their ordeal. Language cannot communicate such an intensely private experience as pain.

Spitz makes the following observation:

"Pain is also unsharable in that it is resistant to language... All our interior states of consciousness: emotional, perceptual, cognitive and somatic can be described as having an object in the external world... This affirms our capacity to move beyond the boundaries of our body into the external, sharable world. This is the space in which we interact and communicate with our environment. But when we explore the interior state of physical pain we find that there is no object 'out there' – no external, referential content. Pain is not of, or for, anything. Pain is. And it draws us away from the space of interaction, the sharable world, inwards. It draws us into the boundaries of our body."

(continued below)

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Bystanders resent the tortured because they make them feel guilty and ashamed for having done nothing to prevent the atrocity. The victims threaten their sense of security and their much-needed belief in predictability, justice, and rule of law. The victims, on their part, do not believe that it is possible to effectively communicate to "outsiders" what they have been through. The torture chambers are "another galaxy". This is how Auschwitz was described by the author K. Zetnik in his testimony in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

Kenneth Pope in "Torture", a chapter he wrote for the "Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender", quotes Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman:

"It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The

victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering."

But, more often, continued attempts to repress fearful memories result in psychosomatic illnesses (conversion). The victim wishes to forget the torture, to avoid re-experiencing the often life threatening abuse and to shield his human environment from the horrors. In conjunction with the victim's pervasive distrust, this is frequently interpreted as hypervigilance, or even paranoia. It seems that the victims can't win. Torture is forever.

But "trauma bonding" is only one aspect of the complex interaction between the narcissist and his victims. Relationships with narcissists are cult-like: a charismatic leader surrounded by obedient, robotic, and admiring followers whose judgment is suspended.

Shared Psychosis (folie a deux)

The narcissist is the guru at the center of a cult. Like other gurus, he demands complete obedience from his flock: his spouse, his offspring, other family members, friends, and colleagues. He feels entitled to adulation and special treatment by his followers. He punishes the wayward and the straying lambs. He enforces discipline, adherence to his teachings, and common goals. The less accomplished he is in reality – the more stringent his mastery and the more pervasive the brainwashing.

The – often involuntary – members of the narcissist's mini-cult inhabit a twilight zone of his own construction. He imposes on them a shared psychosis, replete with persecutory delusions, "enemies", mythical narratives, and apocalyptic scenarios if he is flouted.

The narcissist's control is based on ambiguity, unpredictability, fuzziness, and [ambient abuse](#). His ever-shifting whims exclusively define right versus wrong, desirable and unwanted, what is to be pursued and what to be avoided. He alone determines the rights and obligations of his disciples and alters them at will.

The narcissist is a micro-manager. He exerts control over the minutest details and behaviors. He punishes severely and abuses withholders of information and those who fail to conform to his wishes and goals.

The narcissist does not respect the boundaries and privacy of his reluctant adherents. He ignores their wishes and treats them as objects or instruments of gratification. He seeks to control both situations and people compulsively.

He strongly disapproves of others' personal autonomy and independence. Even innocuous activities, such as meeting a friend or visiting one's family require his permission. Gradually, he isolates his nearest and dearest until they are fully dependent on him emotionally, sexually, financially, and socially.

He acts in a patronizing and condescending manner and criticizes often. He alternates between emphasizing the minutest faults (devalues) and exaggerating the talents, traits, and skills (idealizes) of the members of his cult. He is wildly unrealistic in his expectations – which legitimizes his subsequent abusive conduct.

The narcissist claims to be infallible, superior, talented, skillful, omnipotent, and omniscient. He often lies and confabulates to support these unfounded claims. Within his cult, he expects awe, admiration, adulation, and constant attention commensurate with his outlandish stories and assertions. He reinterprets reality to fit his fantasies.

His thinking is dogmatic, rigid, and doctrinaire. He does not countenance free thought, pluralism, or free speech and doesn't brook criticism and disagreement. He demands – and often gets – complete trust and the relegation to his capable hands of all decision-making.

He forces the participants in his cult to be hostile to critics, the authorities, institutions, his personal enemies, or the media – if they try to uncover his actions and reveal the truth. He closely monitors and censors information from the outside, exposing his captive audience only to selective data and analyses.

The narcissist's cult is "missionary" and "imperialistic". He is always on the lookout for new recruits – his spouse's friends, his daughter's girlfriends, his neighbors, new colleagues at work. He immediately attempts to "convert" them to his "creed" – to convince them how wonderful and admirable he is. In other words, he tries to render them Sources of Narcissistic Supply.

Often, his behavior on these "recruiting missions" is different to his conduct within the "cult". In the first phases of wooing new admirers and proselytizing to potential "conscripts" – the narcissist is attentive, compassionate, empathic, flexible, self-effacing, and helpful. At home, among the "veterans" he is tyrannical, demanding, willful, opinionated, aggressive, and exploitative.

As the leader of his congregation, the narcissist feels entitled to special amenities and benefits not accorded the "rank and file". He expects to be waited on hand and foot, to make free use of everyone's money and dispose of their assets liberally, and to be cynically exempt from the rules that he himself established (if such violation is pleasurable or gainful).

In extreme cases, the narcissist feels above the law – any kind of law. This grandiose and haughty conviction leads to criminal acts, incestuous or polygamous relationships, and recurrent friction with the authorities.

Hence the narcissist's panicky and sometimes violent reactions to "dropouts" from his cult. There's a lot going on that the narcissist wants kept under wraps. Moreover, the narcissist stabilizes his fluctuating sense of self-worth by deriving Narcissistic Supply from his victims. Abandonment threatens the narcissist's precariously balanced personality.

Add to that the narcissist's [paranoid and schizoid tendencies](#), his lack of [introspective self-awareness](#), and his [stunted sense of humor](#) (lack of self-deprecation) and the risks to the grudging members of his cult are clear.

As we discussed in our second dialog, victims can expect very little help from society. Being traumatized, they are often rendered dysfunctional and are labeled by the system as "problematic".

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

We react to serious mishaps, life altering setbacks, disasters, abuse, and death by going through the phases of grieving. Traumas are the complex outcomes of psychodynamic and biochemical processes. But the particulars of traumas depend heavily on the interaction between the victim and his social milieu.

It would seem that while the victim progresses from denial to helplessness, rage, depression and thence to acceptance of the traumatizing events - society demonstrates a diametrically opposed progression. This incompatibility, this mismatch of psychological phases is what leads to the formation and crystallization of trauma.

PHASE I

Victim phase I - DENIAL

The magnitude of such unfortunate events is often so overwhelming, their nature so alien, and their message so menacing - that denial sets in as a defence mechanism aimed at self preservation. The victim denies that the event occurred, that he or she is being abused, that a loved one passed away.

Society phase I - ACCEPTANCE, MOVING ON

The victim's nearest ("Society") - his colleagues, his employees, his clients, even his spouse, children, and friends - rarely experience the events with the same shattering intensity. They are likely to accept the bad news and move on. Even at their most considerate and empathic, they are likely to lose patience with the victim's state of mind. They tend to ignore the victim, or chastise him, to mock, or to deride his feelings or behavior, to collude to repress the painful memories, or to trivialize them.

Summary Phase I

The mismatch between the victim's reactive patterns and emotional needs and society's matter-of-fact attitude hinders growth and healing. The victim requires society's help in avoiding a head-on confrontation with a reality he cannot digest. Instead, society serves as a constant and mentally destabilizing reminder of the root of the victim's unbearable agony (the Job syndrome).

PHASE II

Victim phase II - HELPLESSNESS

Denial gradually gives way to a sense of all-pervasive and humiliating helplessness, often accompanied by debilitating fatigue and mental disintegration. These are among the classic symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). These are the bitter results of the internalization and integration of the harsh realization that there is nothing one can do to alter the outcomes of a natural, or man-made, catastrophe. The horror in confronting one's finiteness, meaninglessness, negligibility, and powerlessness - is overpowering.

Society phase II - DEPRESSION

The more the members of society come to grips with the magnitude of the loss, or evil, or threat represented by the grief inducing events - the sadder they become. Depression is often little more than suppressed or self-directed anger. The anger, in this case, is belatedly induced by an identified or diffuse source of threat, or of evil, or loss. It is a higher level variant of the "fight or flight" reaction, tampered by the rational understanding that the "source" is often too abstract to tackle directly.

Summary Phase II

Thus, when the victim is most in need, terrified by his helplessness and adrift - society is immersed in depression and unable to provide a holding and supporting environment. Growth and healing is again retarded by social interaction. The victim's innate sense of annulment is enhanced by the self-addressed anger (=depression) of those around him.

PHASE III

Both the victim and society react with RAGE to their predicaments. In an effort to narcissistically reassert himself, the victim develops a grandiose sense of anger directed at paranoidly selected, unreal, diffuse, and abstract targets (=frustration sources). By expressing aggression, the victim re-acquires mastery of the world and of himself.

Members of society use rage to re-direct the root cause of their depression (which is, as we said, self directed anger) and to channel it safely. To ensure that this expressed aggression alleviates their depression - real targets must be selected and real punishments meted out. In this respect, "social rage" differs from the victim's. The former is intended to sublimate aggression and channel it in a socially acceptable manner - the latter to reassert narcissistic self-love as an antidote to an all-devouring sense of helplessness.

In other words, society, by itself being in a state of rage, positively enforces the narcissistic rage reactions of the grieving victim. This, in the long run, is counter-productive, inhibits personal growth, and prevents healing. It also erodes the reality test of the victim and encourages self-delusions, paranoid ideation, and ideas of reference.

PHASE IV

Victim Phase IV - DEPRESSION

As the consequences of narcissistic rage - both social and personal - grow more unacceptable, depression sets in. The victim internalizes his aggressive impulses. Self directed rage is safer but is the cause of great sadness and even suicidal ideation. The victim's depression is a way of conforming to social norms. It is also instrumental in ridding the victim of the unhealthy residues of narcissistic regression. It is when the victim acknowledges the malignancy of his rage (and its anti-social nature) that he adopts a depressive stance.

Society Phase IV - HELPLESSNESS

People around the victim ("society") also emerge from their phase of rage transformed. As they realize the futility of their rage, they feel more and more helpless and devoid of options. They grasp their limitations and the irrelevance of their good intentions. They accept the

inevitability of loss and evil and Kafkaesquely agree to live under an ominous cloud of arbitrary judgment, meted out by impersonal powers.

Summary Phase IV

Again, the members of society are unable to help the victim to emerge from a self-destructive phase. His depression is enhanced by their apparent helplessness. Their introversion and inefficacy induce in the victim a feeling of nightmarish isolation and alienation. Healing and growth are once again retarded or even inhibited.

PHASE V

Victim Phase V - ACCEPTANCE AND MOVING ON

Depression - if pathologically protracted and in conjunction with other mental health problems - sometimes leads to suicide. But more often, it allows the victim to process mentally hurtful and potentially harmful material and paves the way to acceptance. Depression is a laboratory of the psyche. Withdrawal from social pressures enables the direct transformation of anger into other emotions, some of them otherwise socially unacceptable. The honest encounter between the victim and his own (possible) death often becomes a cathartic and self-empowering inner dynamic. The victim emerges ready to move on.

Society Phase V - DENIAL

Society, on the other hand, having exhausted its reactive arsenal - resorts to denial. As memories fade and as the victim recovers and abandons his obsessive-compulsive dwelling on his pain - society feels morally justified to forget and forgive. This mood of historical revisionism, of moral leniency, of effusive forgiveness, of re-interpretation, and of a refusal to remember in detail - leads to a repression and denial of the painful events by society.

Summary Phase V

This final mismatch between the victim's emotional needs and society's reactions is less damaging to the victim. He is now more resilient, stronger, more flexible, and more willing to forgive and forget. Society's denial is really a denial of the victim. But, having ridden himself of more primitive narcissistic defenses - the victim can do without society's acceptance, approval, or look. Having endured the purgatory of grieving, he has now re-acquired his self, independent of society's acknowledgement.

(continued below)

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Stephen:

Pain

Ok, I said I would talk about pain with you. No doubt you know how to inflict it on others, and if so, how? My experiences are different from other victims, but I think there is common ground. When I read the e-mails people send me and the tons of mail they send you, I get the distinct impression there is a lot of suffering going on.

Maybe I can break it down into different categories. Let us start with self esteem which should be linked with the concept of self as a space. Narcissists invade you and destroy you from within like termites! (Like that Metaphor, Sam?)

1) Loss of self esteem and pain from exposure to someone with NPD:

a) Negative influence of the narcissist on your self-esteem. Think of them as the eternal critic, but only of others. The narcissist is essentially a person with a negative force, i.e. they feed on other people's goodness and efforts and suck them dry emotionally, financially and spiritually. They give back a negative image of yourself to you so you are left thinking that you are a bad person, while they are good people.

a. If they commit a crime, they will shift the blame to someone else.

b. If they feel bad about something, they will find someone to kick.

c. They enjoy criticizing others even humiliating them in public but will never allow that to happen to them.

d. As in the story of Cinderella, the ugly stepdaughters will bring down the beautiful or more intelligent person with snide remarks and off color comments, so that they will look better.

e. They will take credit for someone else's work while they denounce or discredit the person behind their back.

f. They will steal your ideas, your life, your wife and kids by seduction and pure malice.

g. They will physically intimidate you, pushing or kicking you but only when other people are not looking. They may also have other people do their dirty work, so that they look good.

b) NPDs do not respect your personal space. Think of them as little Hitlers, invading every country around them. The narcissist does not respect anyone's boundaries or privacy. Your life, thoughts and needs are unimportant. Only what you can do for them is noticed and

rewarded, rarely. The invasion of your privacy can take the form of information sharing, of forced physical intimacy, and of down right control. You are expected to think like them, to dress like them, even to talk and walk like them. You are essentially a slave to their whims, and you have no consent to give them, and they will give you no apologies for their behavior. You are at fault, never the narcissist. The pain of loss, of money and of social standing, feeling of worth is devastating for victims who are at a loss as to why the narcissist has gone from wonderful to wicked.

a. In religious cult communities, the leader is all knowing and all good - the leader can sin and fornicate and order you to take poison if they so wish - while you are just an adjunct to their ego trip. Example; Jonestown where the reverend Jones ordered his followers, men, women and children to take cyanic laced lemonade. The comet cult people who self castrated themselves and then committed mass suicide. The UFO cult leader requires his followers to tithe to him their incomes, and practice free sex - reserving the best looking women for him.

b. They believe that you are attracted to them, they will force their attentions on you to the point where you may think they are actually border line, but in the case of a narcissist, they do not go into the I want you go away cycle of emotional intercourse. For the somatic, or sexual narcissist, you must do what they want, you must want them, and they will not accept a no for an answer.

c. The narcissist neighbor who comes over to borrow or lend you tools soon starts to tell you how to take care of your lawn, then your house and soon he is indispensable, even taking care of your house while you are gone, with you leaving the keys with him or her. An example of this behavior happened recently in Georgia where a woman went off for two weeks vacation to Greece and returned to find a woman had moved into her house, lock stock and barrel.

d. A narcissist thief believes they are owed by society, because they are so wonderful, so they take from other people, from their houses, and eventually they will shop lift goods from stores. Remember, everything is just an extension of them, so a NPD is not stealing, just taking what is owed them.

e. A thief breaks into your home and steals the movies of your child growing up, as well as the TV and camera. The narcissist tells you not to mention this to her, because it doesn't fit into the picture of the life she has created. The narcissist neighbor tells you not to blame 'his' neighborhood (he knew about the rash of break-ins but didn't want anyone to know because he did not want the neighborhood to get a bad reputation that would reflect onto him).

f. If you tell a neighbor a secret, it will soon be all over the neighborhood or workplace. They are invertebrate gossips, but only of other people's failings, never their own. They will warm up to you, and wheedle out a juicy tidbit to use against you later. They see no wrong in this ruining other people's reputations. They are sunshine friends - gone when the going gets tough.

I am running out of pain, and I think you have enough to reply to for now.

SM

Sam:

You paint the narcissist as a closet sadist - and, in a way, you are right. You are again correct in observing that narcissists have alloplastic defenses - they tend to blame others for their failures and misfortunes. The list you have compiled is far from being exhaustive. Narcissists are very creative in devising novel methods to torture others.

So, yes, the narcissist inflicts pain and abuse on others. He devalues [Sources of Supply](#), callously and off-handedly abandons them, and discards people, places, partnerships, and friendships unhesitatingly. Some narcissists - though by no means the majority - actually ENJOY abusing, taunting, tormenting, and freakishly controlling others ("gaslighting", [ambient abuse](#), [abuse by proxy](#)). But most of them do these things absentmindedly, automatically, and, often, even without good reason.

What is unusual about the narcissist's sadistic behaviors - premeditated acts of tormenting others while enjoying their anguished reactions - is that they are goal orientated. "Pure" sadists have no goal in mind except the pursuit of pleasure - pain as an art form (remember the Marquis de Sade?). The narcissist, on the other hand, haunts and hunts his victims for a reason - he wants them to reflect his inner state. It is all part of a defense mechanism called "Projective Identification".

When the narcissist is angry, unhappy, disappointed, injured, or hurt - he feels unable to express his emotions sincerely and openly since to do so would be to admit his frailty, his neediness, and his weaknesses. He deplores his own humanity - his emotions, his vulnerability, his susceptibility, his gullibility, his inadequacies, and his failures. So, he makes use of other people to express his pain and his frustration, his pent up anger and his aggression. He achieves this by mentally torturing other people to the point of madness, by driving them to violence, by reducing them to scar tissue in search of outlet, closure, and, sometimes, revenge. He forces people to lose their own character traits - and adopt his own instead. In reaction to his constant and well-targeted abuse, they become abusive, vengeful, ruthless, lacking empathy, obsessed, and aggressive. They mirror him faithfully and thus relieve him of the need to express himself directly. [Narcissism is contagious!](#)

Having constructed this writhing hall of human mirrors, the narcissist withdraws. The goal achieved, he lets go. As opposed to the sadist, he is not in it, indefinitely, for the pleasure of it. He abuses and traumatizes, humiliates and abandons, discards and ignores, insults and provokes - only for the purpose of purging his inner demons. By possessing others, the narcissist purifies himself, cathartically, and exorcises his demented self.

This accomplished, he acts almost with remorse. An episode of extreme abuse is followed by an act of great care and by mellifluous apologies. The Narcissistic Pendulum swings between the extremes of torturing others and empathically soothing the resulting pain. This incongruous behavior, these "sudden" shifts between sadism and altruism, abuse and "love", ignoring and caring, abandoning and clinging, viciousness and remorse, the harsh and the tender - are, perhaps, the most difficult to comprehend and to accept. These swings produce in people around the narcissist emotional insecurity, an eroded sense of self-worth, fear, stress, and anxiety ("walking on eggshells"). Gradually, emotional paralysis ensues and they come to occupy the same emotional wasteland inhabited by the narcissist, his prisoners and hostages in more ways than one - and even when he is long out of their life.

Thus, self-flagellation is a characteristic of those who choose to live with a narcissist (for a choice it is). Constant feelings of guilt, self-reproach, self-recrimination and, thus, self-

punishment characterize the relationships formed between the sadist-narcissist and the masochistic-dependent mate or partner.

As I said, the narcissist is [sadistic](#) because, early on, he was forced into expressing his own guilt and self-reproach in this manner. His Superego is unpredictable, capricious, arbitrary, judgemental, cruel, and self-annihilating (suicidal). Externalising these internal traits is a way of alleviating internal conflicts and fears generated by the narcissist's inner turmoil.

The narcissist projects this "civil war" and drags everyone around him into a swirl of bitterness, suspiciousness, meanness, aggression and pettiness. His life is a reflection of his psychological landscape: barren, paranoid, tormented, guilt ridden. He feels compelled to do unto others what he inflicts upon himself. He gradually transforms his closest, nearest and dearest into replicas of his conflictive, punishing personality structure.

It is important to understand that, to the narcissist, intimacy IS abuse! Love IS abuse! Emotions ARE abusive!

It is an [established fact](#) that abuse – verbal, psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual – co-occurs with intimacy. Most reported offenses are between intimate partners and between parents and children. This defies common sense. Emotionally, it should be easier to batter, molest, assault, or humiliate a total stranger. It's as if intimacy **CAUSES** abuse, incubates and nurtures it.

And, in a way, it does.

Many abusers believe that their abusive conduct fosters, enhances, and cements their intimate relationships. To them, pathological jealousy is proof of love, possessiveness replaces mature bonding, and battering is a form of paying attention to the partner and communicating with her.

Such habitual offenders do not know any better. They were often raised in [families, societies, and cultures](#) where abuse is condoned outright – or, at least, not frowned upon. Maltreatment of one's significant others is part of daily life, as inevitable as the weather, a force of nature.

Intimacy is often perceived to include a license to abuse. The abuser treats his nearest, dearest, and closest as mere objects, instruments of gratification, utilities, or extensions of himself. He feels that he "owns" his spouse, girlfriend, lovers, children, parents, siblings, or colleagues. As the owner, he has the right to "damage the goods" or even dispose of them altogether.

Most abusers are scared of real intimacy and deep commitment. They lead a "pretend", [confabulated life](#). Their "love" and "relationships" are gaudy, fake imitations. The abuser seeks to put a distance between himself and those who truly love him, who cherish and value him as a human being, who enjoy his company, and who strive to establish a long-term, meaningful relationship with him.

Abuse, in other words, is a reaction to the perceived threat of looming intimacy, aimed at fending it off, intended to decimate closeness, tenderness, affection, and compassion before they thrive and consume the abuser. Abuse is a panic reaction. The batterer, the molester, are scared out of their wits – they feel entrapped, imprisoned, shackled, and insidiously altered.

Lashing out in blind and violent rage they punish the perceived perpetrators of intimacy. The more obnoxiously they behave, the less the risk of lifelong bondage. The more heinous their acts, the safer they feel. Battering, molesting, raping, berating, taunting – are all forms of reasserting lost control. In the abuser's thwarted mind, abuse equals mastery and continued, painless, emotionally numbed, survival.

Granted, some narcissists are more subtle than others. They disguise their sadism. For instance, they "educate" their family members or friends (for their sake, as they present it). This "education" is compulsive, obsessive, incessantly, harshly and unduly critical. Its effect is to erode the subject, to humiliate, to create dependence, to intimidate, to restrain, to control, to paralyse.

The victim of such "edification" internalises the endless hectoring and humiliating criticism and makes them his own. She begins to see justice where there is only twisted logic based on crooked assumptions. She begins to self-punish, to withhold, to request approval prior to any action, to forgo her preferences and priorities, to erase her own identity – hoping to thus avoid the excruciating pains of the narcissist's destructive analyses.

Other narcissists are less sophisticated and they use all manner of abuse to domesticate their kin and partners in life. This includes [physical violence](#), [verbal violence](#) (during intensive rage attacks), [psychological abuse](#), brutal "honesty", sick or offending humour, and so on.

And then there is the inexorable economics of Narcissistic Supply.

The narcissist simply discards people when he becomes convinced that they can no longer provide him with [Narcissistic Supply](#). This conviction, subjective and emotionally charged, does not have to be grounded in reality. Suddenly – because of [boredom](#), [disagreement](#), disillusion, a fight, an act, inaction, or a [mood](#) – the narcissist wildly swings from idealisation to devaluation.

The narcissist then detaches immediately. He needs all the energy he can muster to obtain new Sources of Narcissistic Supply and would rather not spend these scarce resources over what he regards as human refuse, the waste left after the extraction of Narcissistic Supply.

To summarize:

The narcissist would tend to display the sadistic aspect of his personality in one of two cases:

1. That the very acts of sadism generate Narcissistic Supply to be consumed by the narcissist ("I inflict pain, therefore I am superior"), or
2. That the victims of his sadism are still his only or major Sources of Narcissistic Supply but are perceived by him to be intentionally frustrating and withholding. Sadistic acts are his way of punishing them for not being docile, obedient, admiring and adoring as he expects them to be in view of his uniqueness, cosmic significance, and special entitlement.

Because of his lack of empathy and his rigid personality, he often inflicts great (physical or mental) pain on meaningful others in his life – and he enjoys their writhing and suffering. In this restricted sense he is a sadist.

To support his sense of uniqueness, greatness and (cosmic) significance, he is often hypervigilant. If he falls from grace – he attributes it to dark forces out to destroy him. If his sense of entitlement is not satisfied and he is ignored by others – he attributes it to the fear and inferiority that he provokes in them. So, to some extent, he is a paranoid.

The narcissist is as much an artist of pain as any sadist. The difference between them lies in their motivation. The narcissist tortures and abuses as means to punish and to reassert superiority, omnipotence, and grandiosity. The sadist does it for pure (usually, sexually-tinged) pleasure. But both are adept at finding the chinks in people's armours. Both are ruthless and venomous in the pursuit of their prey. Both are unable to empathise with their victims, self-centred, and rigid.

The narcissist [abuses his victim](#) verbally, mentally, or physically (often, in all three ways). He infiltrates her defences, shatters her self-confidence, confuses and confounds her, demeans and debases her. He invades her territory, abuses her confidence, exhausts her resources, hurts her loved ones, threatens her stability and security, enmeshes her in his [paranoid state of mind](#), frightens her out of her wits, withholds love and sex from her, prevents satisfaction and causes frustration, humiliates and insults her privately and in public, points out her shortcomings, criticises her profusely and in a "scientific and objective" manner – and this is a partial list.

Very often, the narcissist sadistic acts are disguised as an enlightened interest in the welfare of his victim. He plays the psychiatrist to her psychopathology (totally dreamt up by him). He acts the [guru](#), the avuncular or father figure, the teacher, the only true friend, the old and the experienced. All this in order to weaken her defences and to lay siege to her disintegrating nerves. So subtle and poisonous is the narcissistic variant of sadism that it might well be regarded as the most dangerous of all.

Luckily, the narcissist's attention span is short and his resources and energy limited. In constant, effort consuming and attention diverting pursuit of Narcissistic Supply, the narcissist lets his victim go, usually before it had suffered irreversible damage. The victim is then free to rebuild her life from ruins. Not an easy undertaking, this – but far better than the total obliteration which awaits the victims of the "true" sadist.

If one had to distil the quotidian existence of the narcissist in two pithy sentences, one would say:

The narcissist [loves to be hated](#) and hates to be loved.

Hate is the complement of fear and narcissists like being feared. It imbues them with an intoxicating sensation of omnipotence.

Many of them are veritably inebriated by the looks of horror or repulsion on people's faces: "They know that I am capable of anything."

The sadistic narcissist perceives himself as Godlike, ruthless and unscrupulous, capricious and unfathomable, devoid of emotions and asexual, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, a plague, a devastation, an inescapable verdict.

He nurtures his ill-repute, stoking it and fanning the flames of gossip. It is an enduring asset. Hate and fear are sure-fire generators of attention. It is all about Narcissistic Supply, of course – the drug which narcissists consume and which consumes them in return.

I have composed my own list of abusive behaviors to augment yours:

Narcissistic abusers exploit, lie, insult, demean, ignore (the "silent treatment"), manipulate, and control.

There are many ways to abuse. To love too much is to abuse. It is tantamount to treating someone as an extension, an object, or an instrument of gratification. To be over-protective, not to respect privacy, to be brutally honest, with a sadistic sense of humor, or consistently tactless – is to abuse.

To expect too much, to denigrate, to ignore – are all modes of abuse. There is physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse. The list is long. Most abusers abuse surreptitiously. They are "stealth abusers". You have to actually live with one in order to witness the abuse.

There are three important categories of abuse:

Overt Abuse

The open and explicit abuse of another person. Threatening, coercing, beating, lying, berating, demeaning, chastising, insulting, humiliating, exploiting, ignoring ("silent treatment"), devaluing, unceremoniously discarding, verbal abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse are all forms of overt abuse.

Covert or Controlling Abuse

Abuse is almost entirely about control. It is often a primitive and immature reaction to life circumstances in which the abuser (usually in his childhood) was rendered helpless. It is about re-exerting one's identity, re-establishing predictability, mastering the environment – human and physical.

The bulk of abusive behaviors can be traced to this panicky reaction to the remote potential for loss of control. Many abusers are hypochondriacs (and difficult patients) because they are afraid to lose control over their body, its looks and its proper functioning. They are obsessive-compulsive in an effort to subdue their physical habitat and render it foreseeable. They stalk people and harass them as a means of "being in touch" – another form of control.

To the abuser, nothing exists outside himself. Meaningful others are extensions, internal, assimilated, objects – not external ones. Thus, losing control over a significant other – is equivalent to losing control of a limb, or of one's brain. It is terrifying.

Independent or disobedient people evoke in the abuser the realization that something is wrong with his worldview, that he is not the centre of the world or its cause and that he cannot control what, to him, are internal representations.

To the abuser, losing control means going insane. Because other people are mere elements in the abuser's mind – being unable to manipulate them literally means losing it (his mind). Imagine, if you suddenly were to find out that you cannot manipulate your memories or control your thoughts... Nightmarish!

In his frantic efforts to maintain control or re-assert it, the abuser resorts to a myriad of fiendishly inventive stratagems and mechanisms. Here is a partial list:

Unpredictability and Uncertainty

The abuser acts unpredictably, capriciously, inconsistently and irrationally. This serves to render others dependent upon the next twist and turn of the abuser, his next inexplicable whim, upon his next outburst, denial, or smile.

The abuser makes sure that *HE* is the only reliable element in the lives of his nearest and dearest – by shattering the rest of their world through his seemingly insane behavior. He perpetuates his stable presence in their lives – by destabilizing their own.

Disproportional Reactions

One of the favorite tools of manipulation in the abuser's arsenal is the disproportionality of his reactions. He reacts with supreme rage to the slightest slight. Or, he would punish severely for what he perceives to be an offence against him, no matter how minor. Or, he would throw a temper tantrum over any discord or disagreement, however gently and considerately expressed. Or, he would act inordinately attentive, charming and tempting (even over-sexed, if need be).

This ever-shifting code of conduct and the unusually harsh and arbitrarily applied penalties are premeditated. The victims are kept in the dark. Neediness and dependence on the source of "justice" meted and judgment passed – on the abuser – are thus guaranteed.

Dehumanization and Objectification (Abuse)

People have a need to believe in the empathic skills and basic good-heartedness of others. By dehumanizing and objectifying people – the abuser attacks the very foundations of human interaction. This is the "alien" aspect of abusers – they may be excellent imitations of fully formed adults but they are emotionally absent and immature.

Abuse is so horrid, so repulsive, so phantasmagoric – that people recoil in terror. It is then, with their defenses absolutely down, that they are the most susceptible and vulnerable to the abuser's control. Physical, psychological, verbal and sexual abuse are all forms of dehumanization and objectification.

Abuse of Information

From the first moments of an encounter with another person, the abuser is on the prowl. He collects information. The more he knows about his potential victim – the better able he is to coerce, manipulate, charm, extort or convert it "to the cause". The abuser does not hesitate to misuse the information he gleaned, regardless of its intimate nature or the circumstances in which he obtained it. This is a powerful tool in his armory.

Impossible Situations

The abuser engineers impossible, dangerous, unpredictable, unprecedented, or highly specific situations in which he is sorely needed. The abuser makes sure that his knowledge, his skills, his connections, or his traits are the only ones applicable and the most useful in the situations that he, himself, wrought. The abuser generates his own indispensability.

Control by Proxy

If all else fails, the abuser recruits friends, colleagues, mates, family members, the authorities, institutions, neighbours, the media, teachers – in short, third parties – to do his bidding. He uses them to cajole, coerce, threaten, stalk, offer, retreat, tempt, convince, harass, communicate and otherwise manipulate his target. He controls these unaware instruments exactly as he plans to control his ultimate prey. He employs the same mechanisms and devices. And he dumps his props unceremoniously when the job is done.

Another form of control by proxy is to engineer situations in which abuse is inflicted upon another person. Such carefully crafted scenarios of embarrassment and humiliation provoke social sanctions (condemnation, opprobrium, or even physical punishment) against the victim. Society, or a social group become the instruments of the abuser.

Ambient Abuse

The fostering, propagation and enhancement of an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, instability, unpredictability and irritation. There are no acts of traceable explicit abuse, nor any manipulative settings of control. Yet, the irksome feeling remains, a disagreeable foreboding, a premonition, a bad omen. This is sometimes called "gaslighting".

In the long term, such an environment erodes the victim's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Self-confidence is shaken badly. Often, the victim adopts a paranoid or schizoid stance and thus renders himself or herself exposed even more to criticism and judgment. The roles are thus reversed: the victim is considered mentally deranged and the abuser – the suffering soul.

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, fifth letter to Sam

Dear Sam,

I am sorry if I sound accusatory in my letters. If I sound as if I am blaming you personally as the penultimate or ultimate narcissist and thus an easy target, please excuse me. (Rule no. 1 for victims: never apologize to a narcissist, they take it as a sign of weakness, unless you want something from them ;-) The majority of people who I think are suffering from narcissist have never pardoned themselves or asked for forgiveness. It is a fight to remain sane while in the blender of a narcissist mad playhouse. Perhaps I owe narcissists a debt for making me stronger and wiser. As Nietzsche said, "What does not kill you makes you stronger."

As far as insisting on the dyad nature of narcissist, it takes two to tango, and narcissist do not exist in a social vacuum. There are two sides to the coin of a narcissist, the other side being the victim. You speak eloquently of the narcissist, and seek attention by doing so, but the victims suffer in silence. Until now. My site is an attempt at filling those lacunae, and it is

part of my self-therapy, and it joins a wealth of other sites I have found that speak for the victims.

Sam:

Just to put the record straight, of the 1019 pages on [my narcissism Web site](#), well over 400 are dedicated exclusively to the victims and their plight. I also run large support groups for victims of narcissists - on [Yahoo Groups](#) and [Suite101](#). My work is based on correspondence since 1996 with hundreds of people suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (narcissists), and with thousands of their family members, friends, therapists, and colleagues.

Stephen:

Why is that important? Why talk of the dyad and not just the narcissist? Look at the memorials to the dead, to the tortured, to the voiceless ones (I am being melodramatic here for effect) who could not speak for themselves. The slaves will bear a lot of abuse, but ever so often a 'Spartacus' or other hero throws off the yoke and takes up the challenge. Why do we love going to see hero movies, fighting the bad guys? narcissist bad guys versus the humble victim good guy? So I will continue to hammer away at this theme, and not glorify the narcissist. In my book a victim who is educated and aware, is no longer a victim.

Sam:

What you are saying may have been true 5 or 6 years ago. It is no longer the case. There are dozens of [support groups for victims of narcissists](#) - and literally thousands of [Web sites](#) dedicated to the victims' predicament. Victims definitely have a voice now. So much so that narcissists banded together and formed [their own support groups](#) to counterbalance the victims' lists!!! (laughing).

Stephen:

Yes the Stockholm syndrome is now recognized as a legitimate type of defense/development between the aggressor and the victim. You can check out the experiments that were carried out at Stanford at this site to find out more about how people can be easily turned into monsters and victims:

<http://www.prisonexp.org/>

In my last letter I described the narcissist as someone who invades other people's personal "space". A more salient metaphor would be the actions of a parasite or predator. The definition of a parasite is:

1. A plant or animal that lives on or in another, usually larger, host organism in a way that harms or is of no advantage to the host.

2. Somebody who lives off the generosity of others and does nothing in return.

In other words a narcissist! In my last letter I also mentioned the dyad that forms between the narcissist and the victim. It can also be described as a co-dependency.

The two people involved develop a sort of self-supporting couple, with one who is stronger. They do this because each has something the other wants. In the case of a narcissist/victim dyad, the narcissist is sucking out the admiration and support of the victim, while the victim gets what? As a victim, from experience, I think one can be raised by narcissists to feed them and other narcissists. They tell you to never say anything aggressive, impolite nor disturbing. In other words they blind you to your own pain and need to be whole. They convince you, when young, that you are the person at fault for all that happens to you.

Therefore the narcissist practices hypocrisy; where they can say what they want, do what they want, while you are held to a higher standard than they are. They shackle you with words and morality - while they reserve the right to say whatever they want and to be amoral. The victim has to turn a blind eye to this behavior, learns how to, in order to survive the insanity that they are living in.

Only later do they realize the abuse they have put up with. In work situations the narcissist sometimes has to toe the line, unless they are high enough in the hierarchy or smart enough, to feel they are untouchable.

Sam:

You raise the interesting subject of how narcissists make use of language.

In the narcissist's surrealistic world, even language is pathologized. It mutates into a weapon of self-defence, a verbal fortification, a medium without a message, replacing words with duplicitous and ambiguous vocables.

Narcissists (and, often, by contagion, their unfortunate victims) don't talk, or communicate. They fend off. They hide and evade and avoid and disguise. In their planet of capricious and arbitrary unpredictability, of shifting semiotic and semantic dunes - they perfect the ability to say nothing in lengthy, Castro-like speeches.

The ensuing convoluted sentences are arabesques of meaninglessness, acrobatics of evasion, lack of commitment elevated to an ideology. The narcissist prefers to wait and see what waiting brings. It is the postponement of the inevitable that leads to the inevitability of postponement as a strategy of survival.

It is often impossible to really understand a narcissist. The evasive syntax fast deteriorates into ever more labyrinthine structures. The grammar tortured to produce the verbal Doppler shifts essential to disguise the source of the information, its distance from reality, the speed of its degeneration into rigid "official" versions.

Buried under the lush flora and fauna of idioms without an end, the language erupts, like some exotic rash, an autoimmune reaction to its infection and contamination. Like vile weeds it spread throughout, strangling with absent minded persistence the ability to understand, to feel, to agree, to disagree and to debate, to present arguments, to compare notes, to learn and to teach.

Narcissists, therefore, never talk to others - rather, they talk at others, or lecture them. They exchange subtexts, camouflage-wrapped by elaborate, florid, texts. They read between the lines, spawning a multitude of private languages, prejudices, superstitions, conspiracy

theories, rumors, phobias and hysterias. Theirs is a solipsistic world - where communication is permitted only with oneself and the aim of language is to throw others off the scent or to obtain Narcissistic Supply.

This has profound implications. Communication through unequivocal, unambiguous, information-rich symbol systems is such an integral and crucial part of our world - that its absence is not postulated even in the remotest galaxies which grace the skies of science fiction. In this sense, narcissists are nothing short of aliens. It is not that they employ a different language, a code to be deciphered by a new Freud. It is also not the outcome of upbringing or socio-cultural background.

It is the fact that language is put by narcissists to a different use - not to communicate but to obscure, not to share but to abstain, not to learn but to defend and resist, not to teach but to preserve ever less tenable monopolies, to disagree without incurring wrath, to criticize without commitment, to agree without appearing to do so. Thus, an "agreement" with a narcissist is a vague expression of intent at a given moment - rather than the clear listing of long term, iron-cast and mutual commitments.

The rules that govern the narcissist's universe are loopholed incomprehensibles, open to an exegesis so wide and so self-contradictory that it renders them meaningless. The narcissist often hangs himself by his own verbose Gordic knots, having stumbled through a minefield of logical fallacies and endured self inflicted inconsistencies. Unfinished sentences hover in the air, like vapor above a semantic swamp.

In the case of the inverted narcissist, who was suppressed and abused by overbearing caregivers, there is the strong urge not to offend. Intimacy and inter-dependence are great. Parental or peer pressures are irresistible and result in conformity and self-deprecation. Aggressive tendencies, strongly repressed in the social pressure cooker, teem under the veneer of forced civility and violent politeness. Constructive ambiguity, a non-committal "everyone is good and right", an atavistic variant of moral relativism and tolerance bred of fear and of contempt - are all at the service of this eternal vigilance against aggressive drives, at the disposal of a never ending peacekeeping mission.

With the classic narcissist, language is used cruelly and ruthlessly to ensnare one's enemies, to sow confusion and panic, to move others to emulate the narcissist ("projective identification"), to leave the listeners in doubt, in hesitation, in paralysis, to gain control, or to punish. Language is enslaved and forced to lie. The language is appropriated and expropriated. It is considered to be a weapon, an asset, a piece of lethal property, a traitorous mistress to be gang raped into submission.

(continued below)

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With cerebral narcissists, language is a lover. The infatuation with its very sound leads to a pyrotechnic type of speech which sacrifices its meaning to its music. Its speakers pay more attention to the composition than to the content. They are swept by it, intoxicated by its perfection, inebriated by the spiraling complexity of its forms. Here, language is an inflammatory process. It attacks the very tissues of the narcissist's relationships with artistic fierceness. It invades the healthy cells of reason and logic, of cool headed argumentation and level headed debate.

Language is a leading indicator of the psychological and institutional health of social units, such as the family, or the workplace. Social capital can often be measured in cognitive (hence, verbal-lingual) terms. To monitor the level of comprehensibility and lucidity of texts is to study the degree of sanity of family members, co-workers, friends, spouses, mates, and colleagues. There can exist no hale society without unambiguous speech, without clear communications, without the traffic of idioms and content that is an inseparable part of every social contract. Our language determines how we perceive our world. It IS our mind and our consciousness. The narcissist, in this respect, is a great social menace.

Stephen:

The second way a narcissist operates, in the short term, is in the predator mode. A predator is defined as:

- 1. A carnivorous animal that hunts, kills, and eats other animals in order to survive, or any other organism that behaves in a similar manner.*
- 2. A person, group, company, or state that steals from others or destroys others for gain.*
- 3. Somebody who is extremely aggressive, determined, or persistent (disapproving).*

In the context of evolution, the narcissist predator will meet some approval and success. In companies there is talk of crushing the competition, and the market is considered a jungle where they have to get to a customer before the competition does. On an individual basis, the somatic and intellectual narcissist has the same idea, find and latch onto narcissistic supply. They are constantly looking for victims; in fact narcissists rarely keep friends for long, because once they drain them dry of narcissistic supply, they look for new victims. Of course this contradicts the former definition of the parasitic narcissist. And it should, because I am talking of two different modes of operation. In the first mode I have described the invading narcissist and in the second case, the hit and run narcissist tactics of obtaining supply from victims. "I don't know what hit me" exclaims the victim of a predator narcissist after waking up alone after sleeping with one, describing the man or woman who came onto them the night before at the bar, who seduced them and slept with them and left them. Only afterwards when

you get the test back for STD do you realize what a mistake you have made. That is long lasting pain, especially if you have a case of HIV from that one night of passion.

In lesser degrees, the predator narcissist will give you pain, from just a mild irritation of pinching your bottom to the boardroom back stabber.

Now (you know what is coming Sam) I also believe that narcissist can 'screw' other narcissists. In other words, in short or long term relationships, two or more can band together. A case in point are cliques. They are part of normal development and of our society, but when the ringleader is a narcissist, watch out for a lot of pain being inflicted on others. The case for two narcissist dyad is this; a weaker narcissist will follow around the big narcissist to get the morsels of supply that fall from his or his mouth. Think of the pilot fish that follow around the shark! The smaller narcissist rubs the big narcissist's ego, and also benefit from their reflected glory.

Think of the handlers of the big stars and of their hanger on's. I call such people "anal appendages" and you find them in work situations, they are the brown nosers and office gossips. Not the boss, but the boss narcissist's best buddies. A narcissist may need a hatchet man or woman, so they find a smaller narcissist who they use to do the dirty work (this person is not always a narcissist, just gullible because they believe they are doing the right thing.) By the way, if the hatchet man or women quits the position they will get dumped on as well; a narcissist never forgets a slight and rarely rewards others efforts.

So now that I have elucidated some of my previous comments, I hope, now the DSM IV has listed the characteristics of a narcissist and I think I can hang on the pain that each behavior elicits in victims.

The DSM IV diagnostic sets out the characteristics of Narcissistic Personality Disorder and I will try to show how each one causes a corresponding pain in the victim. Here are examples for each.

(1) Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)

The reverse of this characteristics is the submerging of healthy discussion, of more intelligent comments, and finally of common sense. The man on the soapbox has his opinion, but when it drowns out all others, then it becomes a diatribe. Narcissists are in essence non-democratic because they do not care or do they need other's opinions. They are the center of the world, and like all dictators, they dictate. They make horrible team players, and mediocre bosses only interested in advancing themselves.

Pain:

The self-important need excessive admiration. In a professional capacity, if someone tells everyone he or she is capable of doing something but is incapable of doing it, this may lead to dangerous situations. The classic scene in the movie, Gone with the Wind, where the maid tells Scarlet O'Hara that she knows all about birthing babies, leads to the next scene where the maid is crying that she knows nothing about birthing babies as the baby is born, illustrates this point. If you get on board a private airplane and the pilot takes off, saying he is qualified, then when night falls and the weather turns bad, this pilot admits to being

qualified at instrument flying and soon plunges the airplane into the ocean killing all aboard. The narcissist is always exaggerating their abilities and knowledge. They are amusing at times, because people enjoy hearing stories like this. The Baron Munchausen's was a well-known figure of ancient times who told tall tales. He has received the dubious honor of having a disease named after him. Munchausen's syndrome is diagnosed in a parent or guardian of a child, or children, who deliberately makes the child sick by administering poison or other toxins, so to get the sympathy and admiration of the emergency and hospital staff. Many children die. Now are people suffering from Munchausen's syndrome also narcissists? I am not qualified to say, but there are parallel behaviors; attention seeking, lying, use and abuse of innocent victims.

(2) Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love

Now it is your turn Sam, what can you see as the inverted side of this characteristic? How does this narcissist characteristic cause pain? You can also add the positive things that result from this as well; great romantic novels, artwork, and love stories etc art.

Sam:

We discussed the narcissist's fantasies - and what it does to his victims - in the [third dialog](#). But I take this opportunity to expound on the terminology and sharpen some of the observations I made there.

As I repeatedly say, it is healthy to daydream and fantasise. It is the antechamber of life and often anticipates its circumstances. It is a process of preparing for eventualities. But healthy daydreaming is different from grandiosity.

Grandiosity has four components.

Omnipotence

The narcissist believes in his omnipotence. "Believe" in this context is a weak word. He knows. It is a cellular certainty, almost biological, it flows in his blood and permeates every niche of his being. The narcissist "knows" that he can do anything he chooses to do and excel in it. What the narcissist does, what he excels at, what he achieves, depends only on his volition. To his mind, there is no other determinant.

Hence his rage when confronted with disagreement or opposition – not only because of the audacity of his, evidently inferior, adversaries. But because it threatens his world view, it endangers his feeling of omnipotence. The narcissist is often fatuously daring, adventurous, experimentative and curious precisely due to this hidden assumption of "can-do". He is genuinely surprised and devastated when he fails, when the "universe" does not arrange itself, magically, to accommodate his unbounded fantasies, when it (and people in it) does not comply with his whims and wishes.

He often denies away such discrepancies, deletes them from his memory. As a result, he remembers his life as a patchy quilt of unrelated events and people.

Omniscience

The narcissist often pretends to know everything, in every field of human knowledge and endeavour. He lies and prevaricates to avoid the exposure of his ignorance. He resorts to numerous subterfuges to support his God-like omniscience.

Where his knowledge fails him – he feigns authority, fakes superiority, quotes from non-existent sources, embeds threads of truth in a canvass of falsehoods. He transforms himself into an artist of intellectual prestidigitation. As he gets older, this invidious quality may recede, or, rather, metamorphose. He may now claim more confined expertise.

He may no longer be ashamed to admit his ignorance and his need to learn things outside the fields of his real or self-proclaimed expertise. But this "improvement" is merely optical. Within his "territory", the narcissist is still as fiercely defensive and possessive as ever.

Many narcissists are avowed autodidacts, unwilling to subject their knowledge and insights to peer scrutiny, or, for that matter, to any scrutiny. The narcissist keeps re-inventing himself, adding new fields of knowledge as he goes. This creeping intellectual annexation is a round about way of reverting to his erstwhile image as the erudite "Renaissance man".

Omnipresence

Even the narcissist cannot pretend to actually be everywhere at once in the **PHYSICAL** sense. Instead, he feels that he is the centre and the axis of his "universe", that all things and happenstances revolve around him and that cosmic disintegration would ensue if he were to disappear or to lose interest in someone or in something.

He is convinced, for instance, that he is the main, if not the only, topic of discussion in his absence. He is often surprised and offended to learn that he was not even mentioned. When invited to a meeting with many participants, he assumes the position of the sage, the guru, or the teacher/guide whose words carry a special weight. His creations (books, articles, works of art) are extensions of his presence and, in this restricted sense, he does seem to exist everywhere. In other words, he "stamps" his environment. He "leaves his mark" upon it. He "stigmatises" it.

Narcissist the Omnivore (Perfectionism and Completeness)

There is another "omni" component in grandiosity. The narcissist is an omnivore. He devours and digests experiences and people, sights and smells, bodies and words, books and films, sounds and achievements, his work and his leisure, his pleasure and his possessions. The narcissist is incapable of **ENJOYING** anything because he is in constant pursuit of perfection and completeness.

Classic narcissists interact with the world as predators do with their prey. They want to own it all, be everywhere, experience everything. They cannot delay gratification. They do not take "no" for an answer. And they settle for nothing less than the ideal, the sublime, the perfect, the all-inclusive, the all-encompassing, the engulfing, the all-pervasive, the most beautiful, the cleverest, the richest, and the most brilliant.

The narcissist is shattered when he discovers that a collection he possesses is incomplete, that his colleague's wife is more glamorous, that his son is better than he is in math, that his neighbour has a new, flashy car, that his roommate got promoted, that the "love of his life"

signed a recording contract. It is not plain old jealousy, not even pathological envy (though it is definitely a part of the psychological make-up of the narcissist). It is the discovery that the narcissist is **NOT** perfect, or ideal, or complete that does him in.

Ask anyone who shared a life with a narcissist, or knew one and they are likely to sigh: "What a waste". Waste of potential, waste of opportunities, waste of emotions, a wasteland of arid addiction and futile pursuit.

(continued below)

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Narcissists are as gifted as they come. The problem is to disentangle their tales of fantastic grandiosity from the reality of their talents and skills. They always either over-estimate or devalue their potency. They often emphasise the wrong traits and invest in their mediocre or less than average capacities at the expense of their true and promising potential. Thus, they squander their advantages and under-rate their natural gifts.

The narcissist decides which aspects of his self to nurture and which to neglect. He gravitates towards activities commensurate with his pompous auto-portrait. He suppresses these tendencies and aptitudes in him which don't conform to his inflated view of his uniqueness, brilliance, might, sexual prowess, or standing in society. He cultivates these flairs and predilections which he regards as befitting his overweening self-image and ultimate grandeur.

But, the narcissist, no matter how self-aware and well-meaning, is accursed. His grandiosity, his fantasies, the compelling, overriding urge to feel unique, invested with some cosmic significance, unprecedentedly bestowed – these thwart his best intentions. These structures of obsession and compulsion, these deposits of insecurity and pain, the stalactites and stalagmites of years of abuse and then abandonment – they all conspire to frustrate the gratification, however circumspect, of the narcissist's true nature.

An utter lack of self-awareness is typical of the narcissist. He is intimate only with his False Self, constructed meticulously from years of lying and deceit. The narcissist's True Self is stashed, dilapidated and dysfunctional, in the furthest recesses of his mind. The False Self is

omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, creative, ingenious, irresistible, and glowing. The narcissist often isn't.

Add combustible paranoia to the narcissist's divorce from himself – and his constant and recurrent failure to assess reality fairly is more understandable. The narcissist overpowering sense of entitlement is rarely commensurate with his accomplishments in his real life or with his traits. When the world fails to comply with his demands and to support his grandiose fantasies, the narcissist suspects a plot against him by his inferiors.

The narcissist rarely admits to a weakness, ignorance, or deficiency. He filters out information to the contrary – a cognitive impairment with serious consequences. Narcissistic are likely to unflinchingly make inflated and inane claims about their sexual prowess, wealth, connections, history, or achievements.

All this is mighty embarrassing to the narcissist's nearest, dearest, colleagues, friends, neighbours, or even mere on-lookers. The narcissist's tales are so patently absurd that he often catches people off-guard. Behind his back, the narcissist is derided and mockingly imitated. He fast makes a nuisance and an imposition of himself in every company.

But the narcissist's failure of the reality test can have more serious and irreversible consequences. Narcissists, unqualified to make life-and-death decisions often insist on rendering them. Narcissists pretend to be economists, engineers, or medical doctors – when they are not. But they are not con-artists in the classic, premeditated sense. They firmly believe that, though self-taught at best, they are more qualified than even the properly accredited sort. Narcissists believe in magic and in fantasy. They are no longer with us.

Let's consider one situation - the narcissist in the workplace - to illustrate how the confluence of unbridled grandiosity, inane fantasies, and incessant confabulation leads to pain and destruction.

Consider the perpetrators of the recent spate of financial frauds in the USA.

They acted with callous disregard for both their employees and shareholders - not to mention other stakeholders. Psychologists have often remote-diagnosed them as "malignant, pathological narcissists".

Narcissists are driven by the need to uphold and maintain a false self - a concocted, grandiose, and demanding psychological construct typical of the narcissistic personality disorder. The false self is projected to the world in order to garner "narcissistic supply" - adulation, admiration, or even notoriety and infamy. Any kind of attention is usually deemed by narcissists to be preferable to obscurity.

The false self is suffused with fantasies of perfection, grandeur, brilliance, infallibility, immunity, significance, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. To be a narcissist is to be convinced of a great, inevitable personal destiny. The narcissist is preoccupied with ideal love, the construction of brilliant, revolutionary scientific theories, the composition or authoring or painting of the greatest work of art, the founding of a new school of thought, the attainment of fabulous wealth, the reshaping of a nation or a conglomerate, and so on. The narcissist never sets realistic goals to himself. He is forever preoccupied with fantasies of

uniqueness, record breaking, or breathtaking achievements. His verbosity reflects this propensity.

Reality is, naturally, quite different and this gives rise to a "grandiosity gap". The demands of the false self are never satisfied by the narcissist's accomplishments, standing, wealth, clout, sexual prowess, or knowledge. The narcissist's grandiosity and sense of entitlement are equally incommensurate with his achievements.

To bridge the grandiosity gap, the malignant (pathological) narcissist resorts to shortcuts. These very often lead to fraud.

The narcissist cares only about appearances. What matters to him are the facade of wealth and its attendant social status and narcissistic supply. Witness the travestied extravagance of Tyco's Denis Kozlowski. Media attention only exacerbates the narcissist's addiction and makes it incumbent on him to go to ever-wilder extremes to secure uninterrupted supply from this source.

The narcissist lacks empathy - the ability to put himself in other people's shoes. He does not recognize boundaries - personal, corporate, or legal. Everything and everyone are to him mere instruments, extensions, objects unconditionally and uncomplainingly available in his pursuit of narcissistic gratification.

This makes the narcissist perniciously exploitative. He uses, abuses, devalues, and discards even his nearest and dearest in the most chilling manner. The narcissist is utility-driven, obsessed with his overwhelming need to reduce his anxiety and regulate his labile sense of self-worth by securing a constant supply of his drug - attention. American executives acted without compunction when they raided their employees' pension funds - as did Robert Maxwell a generation earlier in Britain.

The narcissist is convinced of his superiority - cerebral or physical. To his mind, he is a Gulliver hamstrung by a horde of narrow-minded and envious Lilliputians. The dotcom "new economy" was infested with "visionaries" with a contemptuous attitude towards the mundane: profits, business cycles, conservative economists, doubtful journalists, and cautious analysts.

Yet, deep inside, the narcissist is painfully aware of his addiction to others - their attention, admiration, applause, and affirmation. He despises himself for being thus dependent. He hates people the same way a drug addict hates his pusher. He wishes to "put them in their place", humiliate them, demonstrate to them how inadequate and imperfect they are in comparison to his regal self and how little he craves or needs them.

The narcissist regards himself as one would an expensive present, a gift to his company, to his family, to his neighbours, to his colleagues, to his country. This firm conviction of his inflated importance makes him feel entitled to special treatment, special favors, special outcomes, concessions, subservience, immediate gratification, obsequiousness, and lenience. It also makes him feel immune to mortal laws and somehow divinely protected and insulated from the inevitable consequences of his deeds and misdeeds.

The self-destructive narcissist plays the role of the "bad guy" (or "bad girl"). But even this is within the traditional social roles cartoonishly exaggerated by the narcissist to attract

attention. Men are likely to emphasise intellect, power, aggression, money, or social status. Narcissistic women are likely to emphasise body, looks, charm, sexuality, feminine "traits", homemaking, children and childrearing.

Punishing the wayward narcissist is a veritable catch-22.

A jail term is useless as a deterrent if it only serves to focus attention on the narcissist. Being infamous is second best to being famous - and far preferable to being ignored. The only way to effectively punish a narcissist is to withhold narcissistic supply from him and thus to prevent him from becoming a notorious celebrity.

Given a sufficient amount of media exposure, book contracts, talk shows, lectures, and public attention - the narcissist may even consider the whole grisly affair to be emotionally rewarding. To the narcissist, freedom, wealth, social status, family, vocation - are all means to an end. And the end is attention. If he can secure attention by being the big bad wolf - the narcissist unhesitatingly transforms himself into one. Lord Archer, for instance, seems to be positively basking in the media circus provoked by his prison diaries.

The narcissist does not victimise, plunder, terrorise and abuse others in a cold, calculating manner. He does so offhandedly, as a manifestation of his genuine character. To be truly "guilty" one needs to intend, to deliberate, to contemplate one's choices and then to choose one's acts. The narcissist does none of these.

(continued below)

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Thus, punishment breeds in him surprise, hurt and seething anger. The narcissist is stunned by society's insistence that he should be held accountable for his deeds and penalized accordingly. He feels wronged, baffled, injured, the victim of bias, discrimination and injustice. He rebels and rages.

Depending upon the pervasiveness of his magical thinking, the narcissist may feel besieged by overwhelming powers, forces cosmic and intrinsically ominous. He may develop compulsive rites to fend off this "bad", unwarranted, persecutory influences.

The narcissist, very much the infantile outcome of stunted personal development, engages in magical thinking. He feels omnipotent, that there is nothing he couldn't do or achieve if only he sets his mind to it. He feels omniscient - he rarely admits to ignorance and regards his intuitions and intellect as founts of objective data.

Thus, narcissists are haughtily convinced that introspection is a more important and more efficient (not to mention easier to accomplish) method of obtaining knowledge than the systematic study of outside sources of information in accordance with strict and tedious curricula. Narcissists are "inspired" and they despise hamstrung technocrats.

To some extent, they feel omnipresent because they are either famous or about to become famous or because their product is selling or is being manufactured globally. Deeply immersed in their delusions of grandeur, they firmly believe that their acts have - or will have - a great influence not only on their firm, but on their country, or even on Mankind. Having mastered the manipulation of their human environment - they are convinced that they will always "get away with it". They develop hubris and a false sense of immunity.

Narcissistic immunity is the (erroneous) feeling, harboured by the narcissist, that he is impervious to the consequences of his actions, that he will never be effected by the results of his own decisions, opinions, beliefs, deeds and misdeeds, acts, inaction, or membership of certain groups, that he is above reproach and punishment, that, magically, he is protected and will miraculously be saved at the last moment. Hence the audacity, simplicity, and transparency of some of the fraud and corporate looting in the 1990's. Narcissists rarely bother to cover their traces, so great is their disdain and conviction that they are above mortal laws and wherewithal.

What are the sources of this unrealistic appraisal of situations and events?

The false self is a childish response to abuse and trauma. Abuse is not limited to sexual molestation or beatings. Smothering, doting, pampering, over-indulgence, treating the child as an extension of the parent, not respecting the child's boundaries, and burdening the child with excessive expectations are also forms of abuse.

The child reacts by constructing false self that is possessed of everything it needs in order to prevail: unlimited and instantaneously available Harry Potter-like powers and wisdom. The false self, this Superman, is indifferent to abuse and punishment. This way, the child's true self is shielded from the toddler's harsh reality.

This artificial, maladaptive separation between a vulnerable (but not punishable) true self and a punishable (but invulnerable) false self is an effective mechanism. It isolates the child from the unjust, capricious, emotionally dangerous world that he occupies. But, at the same time, it fosters in him a false sense of "nothing can happen to me, because I am not here, I am not available to be punished, hence I am immune to punishment".

The comfort of false immunity is also yielded by the narcissist's sense of entitlement. In his grandiose delusions, the narcissist is sui generis, a gift to humanity, a precious, fragile, object. Moreover, the narcissist is convinced both that this uniqueness is immediately discernible - and that it gives him special rights. The narcissist feels that he is protected by some cosmological law pertaining to "endangered species".

He is convinced that his future contribution to others - his firm, his country, humanity - should and does exempt him from the mundane: daily chores, boring jobs, recurrent tasks, personal exertion, orderly investment of resources and efforts, laws and regulations, social conventions, and so on.

The narcissist is entitled to a "special treatment": high living standards, constant and immediate catering to his needs, the eradication of any friction with the humdrum and the routine, an all-engulfing absolution of his sins, fast track privileges (to higher education, or in his encounters with bureaucracies, for instance). Punishment, trusts the narcissist, is for ordinary people, where no great loss to humanity is involved.

Narcissists are possessed of inordinate abilities to charm, to convince, to seduce, and to persuade. Many of them are gifted orators and intellectually endowed. Many of them work in politics, the media, fashion, show business, the arts, medicine, or business, and serve as religious leaders.

By virtue of their standing in the community, their charisma, or their ability to find the willing scapegoats, they do get exempted many times. Having recurrently "got away with it" - they develop a theory of personal immunity, founded upon some kind of societal and even cosmic "order" in which certain people are above punishment.

But there is a fourth, simpler, explanation. The narcissist lacks self-awareness. Divorced from his true self, unable to empathise (to understand what it is like to be someone else), unwilling to constrain his actions to cater to the feelings and needs of others - the narcissist is in a constant dreamlike state.

To the narcissist, his life is unreal, like watching an autonomously unfolding movie. The narcissist is a mere spectator, mildly interested, greatly entertained at times. He does not "own" his actions. He, therefore, cannot understand why he should be punished and when he is, he feels grossly wronged.

So convinced is the narcissist that he is destined to great things - that he refuses to accept setbacks, failures and punishments. He regards them as temporary, as the outcomes of someone else's errors, as part of the future mythology of his rise to power/brilliance/wealth/ideal love, etc. Being punished is a diversion of his precious energy and resources from the all-important task of fulfilling his mission in life.

The narcissist is pathologically envious of people and believes that they are equally envious of him. He is paranoid, on guard, ready to fend off an imminent attack. A punishment to the narcissist is a major surprise and a nuisance but it also validates his suspicion that he is being persecuted. It proves to him that strong forces are arrayed against him.

He tells himself that people, envious of his achievements and humiliated by them, are out to get him. He constitutes a threat to the accepted order. When required to pay for his misdeeds, the narcissist is always disdainful and bitter and feels misunderstood by his inferiors.

Cooked books, corporate fraud, bending the (GAAP or other) rules, sweeping problems under the carpet, over-promising, making grandiose claims (the "vision thing") - are hallmarks of a narcissist in action. When social cues and norms encourage such behavior rather than inhibit it - in other words, when such behavior elicits abundant narcissistic supply - the pattern is

reinforced and become entrenched and rigid. Even when circumstances change, the narcissist finds it difficult to adapt, shed his routines, and replace them with new ones. He is trapped in his past success. He becomes a swindler.

Let me now ask you a question:

Do you feel that narcissism has cultural and social components and determinants - or is it the narcissist's way or shifting responsibility to others, of exercising his alloplastic defenses (narcissist: I am not to blame - it is the way I was brought up in this narcissistic culture)?

My view is that pathological narcissism is not an isolated phenomenon. It is embedded in our contemporary culture. The West's is a narcissistic civilization. It upholds narcissistic values and penalizes alternative value-systems. From an early age, children are taught to avoid self-criticism, to deceive themselves regarding their capacities and attainments, to feel entitled, and to exploit others.

As Lillian Katz observed in her important paper, "Distinctions between Self-Esteem and Narcissism: Implications for Practice", published by the Educational Resources Information Center, the line between enhancing self-esteem and fostering narcissism is often blurred by educators and parents.

Both Christopher Lasch in "The Culture of Narcissism" and Theodore Millon in his books about personality disorders, singled out American society as narcissistic. Litigiousness may be the flip side of an inane sense of entitlement. Consumerism is built on this common and communal lie of "I can do anything I want and possess everything I desire if I only apply myself to it" and on the pathological envy it fosters.

Not surprisingly, narcissistic disorders are more common among men than among women. This may be because narcissism conforms to masculine social mores and to the prevailing ethos of capitalism. Ambition, achievements, hierarchy, ruthlessness, drive - are both social values and narcissistic male traits. Social thinkers like the aforementioned Lasch speculated that modern American culture - a self-centred one - increases the rate of incidence of the narcissistic personality disorder.

Otto Kernberg, a notable scholar of personality disorders, confirmed Lasch's intuition: "Society can make serious psychological abnormalities, which already exist in some percentage of the population, seem to be at least superficially appropriate."

In their book "***Personality Disorders in Modern Life***", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis state, as a matter of fact, that pathological narcissism was once the preserve of "the royal and the wealthy" and that it "seems to have gained prominence only in the late twentieth century". Narcissism, according to them, may be associated with "higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs ... Individuals in less advantaged nations .. are too busy trying (to survive) ... to be arrogant and grandiose".

They - like Lasch before them - attribute pathological narcissism to "a society that stresses individualism and self-gratification at the expense of community, namely the United States." They assert that the disorder is more prevalent among certain professions with "star power" or respect. "In an individualistic culture, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the world'. In a collectivist society, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the collective.'"

Millon quotes Warren and Caponi's *"The Role of Culture in the Development of Narcissistic Personality Disorders in America, Japan and Denmark"*:

"Individualistic narcissistic structures of self-regard (in individualistic societies) ... are rather self-contained and independent ... (In collectivist cultures) narcissistic configurations of the we-self ... denote self-esteem derived from strong identification with the reputation and honor of the family, groups, and others in hierarchical relationships."

Still, there are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day laborers in east Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan. Malignant narcissism is all-pervasive and independent of culture and society. It is true, though, that the **way** pathological narcissism manifests and is experienced is dependent on the particulars of societies and cultures.

In some cultures, it is encouraged, in others suppressed. In some societies it is channeled against minorities - in others it is tainted with paranoia. In collectivist societies, it may be projected onto the collective, in individualistic societies, it is an individual's trait.

Yet, can families, organizations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as "narcissistic" or "pathologically self-absorbed"? Can we talk about a "corporate culture of narcissism"?

Human collectives - states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands - acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, competitors, or adversaries, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale, language, and history - the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-pervasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behavior of each and every member. It is a defining - though often implicit or underlying - mental structure. It has explanatory and predictive powers. It is recurrent and invariable - a pattern of conduct melding distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

So, what says you, oh, modern-day Spartacus? (laughing)

Tuesday, November 30, 2004, Sixth letter to Sam

Dear Sam,

I took some time to think about your question in the [last letter](#) and even rewrote my reply several times. Let me reproduce your question again. Sam asked me this:

"Do you feel that narcissism has cultural and social components and determinants - or is it the narcissist's way or shifting responsibility to others, of exercising his alloplastic defenses (narcissist: I am not to blame - it is the way I was brought up in this narcissistic culture)?"

Is there an organic cause?

In order to answer this question clearly and concisely, I will have to back up a bit and define what is "normal". Firstly, I would like to refer you to Dr. John J Ratey a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School who has co-authored *Shadow Syndromes* (1997) with Catherine Johnson, Ph.D. In it he puts forth the idea that we all suffer from some sort of mental disorder, but in very slight degrees. In other words, all of us are mentally ill in slight degrees, but the 'normal' people can function without causing too much harm to others. I believe this to be true, in that all of us are capable of doing some crazy things and acting crazy but we 'normally' do not; whether this is because society and its laws keep us all from killing each other, or because we tend to be 'herd' animals, it all boils down to getting along with each other as best we can. (This theory of carrying around the potential for mental disorders parallels the germ theory in that we also have germs, viruses, parasites and fungi that inhabit our bodies - or are in the environment - and that usually do us no harm - but they have the potential to under the right circumstances.)

You and anyone else reading what I just wrote may doubt the veracity of my assertion of communal 'madness' or 'potential madness'. Yet there are many examples of this happening. Take the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918. I have just finished reading a book entitled, "The Great Influenza, The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History" by John M. Barry. The title by itself is alarming, yet "The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 killed more people than the Great War, known today as World War I (WWI), at somewhere between 20 and 40 million people. It has been cited as the most devastating epidemic in recorded world history. More people died of influenza in a single year than in four-years of the Black Death Bubonic Plague from 1347 to 1351" (<http://www.stanford.edu/group/virus/uda/>)

Some estimates go as high as 100 million deaths. One side effect I discovered after reading John Barry's book was that the disease sparked an invasion of the brain by white blood cells with resulting high fevers; both produced sequel that mimicked psychosis and in some cases it may have caused the patient to become schizophrenic. (Some studies that followed a more recent flu outbreak in Finland showed that women, who were pregnant and caught the flu, had a higher average of children who eventually became schizophrenic.)

I talked to a friend recently who told me the story of how his father started acting strangely, even crazy. People thought he was crazy - but luckily for him when the doctors examined him, they found he suffered from pernicious anemia and lacked enough vitamin B12. Certain mental disorders are linked to brain chemistry and can be treated with drugs, or at least the drugs can alleviate some of the symptoms.

Sam:

You have no argument with me there. I doubt the very concept of "mental illness".

Someone is considered mentally "ill" if:

1. His conduct rigidly and consistently deviates from the typical, average behavior of all other people in his culture and society that fit his profile (whether this conventional behavior is moral or rational is immaterial), or
2. His judgment and grasp of objective, physical reality is impaired, and
3. His conduct is not a matter of choice but is innate and irresistible, and
4. His behavior causes him or others discomfort, and is
5. Dysfunctional, self-defeating, and self-destructive even by his own yardsticks.

Descriptive criteria aside, what is the *essence* of mental disorders? Are they merely physiological disorders of the brain, or, more precisely of its chemistry? If so, can they be cured by restoring the balance of substances and secretions in that mysterious organ? And, once equilibrium is reinstated – is the illness "gone" or is it still lurking there, "under wraps", waiting to erupt? Are psychiatric problems inherited, rooted in faulty genes (though amplified by environmental factors) – or brought on by abusive or wrong nurturance?

These questions are the domain of the "medical" school of mental health.

Others cling to the spiritual view of the human psyche. They believe that mental ailments amount to the metaphysical discomposure of an unknown medium – the soul. Theirs is a holistic approach, taking in the patient in his or her entirety, as well as his milieu.

The members of the functional school regard mental health disorders as perturbations in the proper, statistically "normal", behaviors and manifestations of "healthy" individuals, or as dysfunctions. The "sick" individual – ill at ease with himself (ego-dystonic) or making others unhappy (deviant) – is "mended" when rendered functional again by the prevailing standards of his social and cultural frame of reference.

In a way, the three schools are akin to the trio of blind men who render disparate descriptions of the very same elephant. Still, they share not only their subject matter – but, to a counter intuitively large degree, a faulty methodology.

As the renowned anti-psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, of the State University of New York, notes in his article "*The Lying Truths of Psychiatry*", mental health scholars, regardless of academic predilection, infer the etiology of mental disorders from the success or failure of treatment modalities.

This form of "reverse engineering" of scientific models is not unknown in other fields of science, nor is it unacceptable if the experiments meet the criteria of the scientific method. The theory must be all-inclusive (anamnetic), consistent, falsifiable, logically compatible, monovalent, and parsimonious. Psychological "theories" – even the "medical" ones (the role of serotonin and dopamine in mood disorders, for instance) – are usually none of these things.

The outcome is a bewildering array of ever-shifting mental health "diagnoses" expressly centred around Western civilisation and its standards (example: the ethical objection to suicide). Neurosis, a historically fundamental "condition" vanished after 1980. Homosexuality, according to the American Psychiatric Association, was a pathology prior to 1973. Seven years later, narcissism was declared a "personality disorder", almost seven decades after it was first described by Freud.

Indeed, personality disorders are an excellent example of the kaleidoscopic landscape of "objective" psychiatry.

The classification of Axis II personality disorders – deeply ingrained, maladaptive, lifelong behavior patterns – in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, text revision [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] – or the DSM-IV-TR for short – has come under sustained and serious criticism from its inception in 1952, in the first edition of the DSM.

The DSM IV-TR adopts a categorical approach, postulating that personality disorders are "*qualitatively distinct clinical syndromes*" (p. 689). This is widely doubted. Even the distinction made between "normal" and "disordered" personalities is increasingly being rejected. The "diagnostic thresholds" between normal and abnormal are either absent or weakly supported.

The polythetic form of the DSM's Diagnostic Criteria – only a subset of the criteria is adequate grounds for a diagnosis – generates unacceptable diagnostic heterogeneity. In other words, people diagnosed with the same personality disorder may share only one criterion or none.

The DSM fails to clarify the exact relationship between Axis II and Axis I disorders and the way chronic childhood and developmental problems interact with personality disorders.

The differential diagnoses are vague and the personality disorders are insufficiently demarcated. The result is excessive co-morbidity (multiple Axis II diagnoses).

The DSM contains little discussion of what distinguishes normal character (personality), personality traits, or personality style (Millon) – from personality disorders.

A dearth of documented clinical experience regarding both the disorders themselves and the utility of various treatment modalities.

Numerous personality disorders are "not otherwise specified" – a catchall, basket "category".

(continued below)

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Cultural bias is evident in certain disorders (such as the Antisocial and the Schizotypal).

The emergence of dimensional alternatives to the categorical approach is acknowledged in the DSM-IV-TR itself:

“An alternative to the categorical approach is the dimensional perspective that Personality Disorders represent maladaptive variants of personality traits that merge imperceptibly into normality and into one another” (p.689)

The following issues – long neglected in the DSM – are likely to be tackled in future editions as well as in current research. But their omission from official discourse hitherto is both startling and telling:

- The longitudinal course of the disorder(s) and their temporal stability from early childhood onwards;
- The genetic and biological underpinnings of personality disorder(s);
- The development of personality psychopathology during childhood and its emergence in adolescence;
- The interactions between physical health and disease and personality disorders;
- The effectiveness of various treatments – talk therapies as well as psychopharmacology.

Certain mental health afflictions are either correlated with a statistically abnormal biochemical activity in the brain – or are ameliorated with medication. Yet the two *facts* are not ineludibly facets of *the same* underlying phenomenon. In other words, that a given medicine reduces or abolishes certain symptoms does not necessarily mean they were *caused* by the processes or substances affected by the drug administered. Causation is only one of many possible connections and chains of events.

To designate a pattern of behavior as a mental health disorder is a value judgment, or at best a statistical observation. Such designation is effected regardless of the facts of brain science. Moreover, correlation is not causation. Deviant brain or body biochemistry (once called "polluted animal spirits") do exist – but are they truly the roots of mental perversion? Nor is it clear which triggers what: do the aberrant neurochemistry or biochemistry cause mental illness – or the other way around?

That psychoactive medication alters behavior and mood is indisputable. So do illicit and legal drugs, certain foods, and all interpersonal interactions. That the changes brought about by prescription are desirable – is debatable and involves tautological thinking. If a certain pattern of behavior is described as (socially) "dysfunctional" or (psychologically) "sick" – clearly, every change would be welcomed as "healing" and every agent of transformation would be called a "cure".

The same applies to the alleged heredity of mental illness. Single genes or gene complexes are frequently "associated" with mental health diagnoses, personality traits, or behavior patterns. But too little is known to establish irrefutable sequences of causes-and-effects. Even less is proven about the interaction of nature and nurture, genotype and phenotype, the plasticity of the brain and the psychological impact of trauma, abuse, upbringing, role models, peers, and other environmental elements.

Nor is the distinction between psychotropic substances and talk therapy that clear-cut. Words and the interaction with the therapist also affect the brain, its processes and chemistry - albeit more slowly and, perhaps, more profoundly and irreversibly. Medicines – as David Kaiser reminds us in *"Against Biologic Psychiatry"* (Psychiatric Times, Volume XIII, Issue 12, December 1996) – treat symptoms, not the underlying processes that yield them.

If mental illnesses are bodily and empirical, they should be invariant both temporally and spatially, across cultures and societies. This, to some degree, is, indeed, the case. Psychological diseases are not context dependent – but the pathologizing of certain behaviors is. Suicide, substance abuse, narcissism, eating disorders, antisocial ways, schizotypal symptoms, depression, even psychosis are considered sick by some cultures – and utterly normative or advantageous in others.

This was to be expected. The human mind and its dysfunctions are alike around the world. But values differ from time to time and from one place to another. Hence, disagreements about the propriety and desirability of human actions and inaction are bound to arise in a symptom-based diagnostic system.

As long as the *pseudo-medical* definitions of mental health disorders continue to rely exclusively on signs and symptoms – i.e., mostly on observed or reported behaviors – they remain vulnerable to such discord and devoid of much-sought universality and rigor.

The mentally sick receive the same treatment as carriers of AIDS or SARS or the Ebola virus or smallpox. They are sometimes quarantined against their will and coerced into involuntary treatment by medication, psychosurgery, or electroconvulsive therapy. This is done in the name of the greater good, largely as a preventive policy.

Conspiracy theories notwithstanding, it is impossible to ignore the enormous interests vested in psychiatry and psychopharmacology. The multibillion dollar industries involving drug companies, hospitals, managed healthcare, private clinics, academic departments, and law enforcement agencies rely, for their continued and exponential growth, on the propagation of the concept of "mental illness" and its corollaries: treatment and research.

Abstract concepts form the core of all branches of human knowledge. No one has ever seen a quark, or untangled a chemical bond, or surfed an electromagnetic wave, or visited the unconscious. These are useful metaphors, theoretical entities with explanatory or descriptive power.

"Mental health disorders" are no different. They are shorthand for capturing the unsettling quiddity of "the Other". Useful as taxonomies, they are also tools of social coercion and conformity, as Michel Foucault and [Louis Althusser](#) observed. Relegating both the dangerous and the idiosyncratic to the collective fringes is a vital technique of social engineering.

The aim is progress through social cohesion and the regulation of innovation and creative destruction. Psychiatry, therefore, is reifies society's preference of evolution to revolution, or, worse still, to mayhem. As is often the case with human Endeavour, it is a noble cause, unscrupulously and dogmatically pursued.

"It is an ill thing to knock against a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. He that wounds them is culpable, but if they wound him they are not culpable." (Mishna, Babylonian Talmud)

If mental illness is culture-dependent and mostly serves as an organizing social principle - what should we make of the insanity defense (NGRI- Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity)?

A person is held not responsible for his criminal actions if s/he cannot tell right from wrong ("lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the criminality (wrongfulness) of his conduct" - diminished capacity), did not intend to act the way he did (absent "mens rea") and/or could not control his behavior ("irresistible impulse"). These handicaps are often associated with "mental disease or defect" or "mental retardation".

Mental health professionals prefer to talk about an impairment of a ["person's perception or understanding of reality"](#). They hold a "guilty but mentally ill" verdict to be contradiction in terms. All "mentally-ill" people operate within a (usually coherent) worldview, with consistent internal logic, and rules of right and wrong (ethics). Yet, these rarely conform to the way most people perceive the world. The mentally-ill, therefore, cannot be guilty because s/he has a tenuous grasp on reality.

Yet, experience teaches us that a criminal maybe mentally ill even as s/he maintains a perfect reality test and thus is held criminally responsible (Jeffrey Dahmer comes to mind). The "perception and understanding of reality", in other words, can and does co-exist even with the severest forms of mental illness.

This makes it even more difficult to comprehend what is meant by "mental disease". If some mentally ill maintain a grasp on reality, know right from wrong, can anticipate the outcomes of their actions, are not subject to irresistible impulses (the official position of the American Psychiatric Association) - in what way do they differ from us, "normal" folks?

This is why the insanity defense often sits ill with mental health pathologies deemed socially "acceptable" and "normal" - such as religion or [love](#).

Consider the following case:

A mother bashes the skulls of her three sons. Two of them die. She claims to have acted on instructions she had received from God. She is found not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury determined that she ["did not know right from wrong during the killings."](#)

But why exactly was she judged insane?

Her belief in the existence of God - a being with inordinate and inhuman attributes - may be irrational.

But it does not constitute insanity in the strictest sense because it conforms to social and cultural creeds and codes of conduct in her milieu. Billions of people faithfully subscribe to the same ideas, adhere to the same transcendental rules, observe the same mystical rituals, and claim to go through the same experiences. This shared psychosis is so widespread that it can no longer be deemed pathological, statistically speaking.

She claimed that God has spoken to her.

As do numerous other people. Behavior that is considered psychotic (paranoid-schizophrenic) in other contexts is lauded and admired in religious circles. Hearing voices and seeing visions - auditory and visual delusions - are considered rank manifestations of righteousness and sanctity.

Perhaps it was the content of her hallucinations that proved her insane?

She claimed that God had instructed her to kill her boys. Surely, God would not ordain such evil?

Alas, the Old and New Testaments both contain examples of God's appetite for human sacrifice. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son (though this savage command was rescinded at the last moment). Jesus, the son of God himself, was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity.

A divine injunction to slay one's offspring would sit well with the Holy Scriptures and the Apocrypha as well as with millennia-old Judeo-Christian traditions of martyrdom and sacrifice.

(continued below)

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Her actions were wrong and incommensurate with both human and divine (or natural) laws.

Yes, but they were perfectly in accord with a literal interpretation of certain divinely-inspired texts, millennial scriptures, apocalyptic thought systems, and fundamentalist religious ideologies (such as the ones espousing the imminence of "rupture"). Unless one declares these doctrines and writings insane, her actions are not.

we are forced to the conclusion that the murderous mother is perfectly sane. Her frame of reference is different to ours. Hence, her definitions of right and wrong are idiosyncratic. To her, killing her babies was the right thing to do and in conformity with valued teachings and her own epiphany. Her grasp of reality - the immediate and later consequences of her actions - was never impaired.

It would seem that sanity and insanity are relative terms, dependent on frames of cultural and social reference, and statistically defined. There isn't - and, in principle, can never emerge - an "objective", medical, scientific test to determine mental health or disease unequivocally.

"Normal" people adapt to their environment - both human and natural.

"Abnormal" ones try to adapt their environment - both human and natural - to their idiosyncratic needs/profile.

If they succeed, their environment, both human (society) and natural is pathologized.

Stephen:

My own research on the Internet and in books has produced no evidence of an organic or genetic cause for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. It may yet be found. Schizophrenic was once considered caused by 'bad mothering' - as postulated by the early Freudians. Even now there is no definite definition of the disease according to the psychiatrists I work with. The discovery of a possible gene linked to schizophrenic in the genome pool of Iceland and a mouse model with the same gene may shed more light onto this mental disease. Perhaps further research will show that there is a true genetic link.

NPD may also have a genetic marker, yet I am skeptical. I am skeptical because NPD involves the 'personality' of someone, and I believe 'personality' is something that is constructed over the years.

Sam:

Being a narcissist, I often think:

Is pathological narcissism the outcome of inherited traits - or the sad result of abusive and traumatizing upbringing? Or, maybe it is the confluence of both? It is a common occurrence, after all, that, in the same family, with the same set of parents and an identical emotional environment - some siblings grow to be malignant narcissists, while others are perfectly "normal". Surely, this indicates a predisposition of some people to developing narcissism, a part of one's genetic heritage.

This vigorous debate may be the offshoot of obfuscating semantics.

When we are born, we are not much more than the sum of our genes and their manifestations. Our brain - a physical object - is the residence of mental health and its disorders. Mental illness cannot be explained without resorting to the body and, especially, to the brain. And our brain cannot be contemplated without considering our genes. Thus, any explanation of our mental life that leaves out our hereditary makeup and our neurophysiology is lacking. Such lacking theories are nothing but literary narratives. Psychoanalysis, for instance, is often accused of being divorced from corporeal reality.

Our genetic baggage makes us resemble a personal computer. We are an all-purpose, universal, machine. Subject to the right programming (conditioning, socialization, education, upbringing) - we can turn out to be anything and everything. A computer can imitate any other kind of discrete machine, given the right software. It can play music, screen movies, calculate, print, paint. Compare this to a television set - it is constructed and expected to do one, and only one, thing. It has a single purpose and a unitary function. We, humans, are more like computers than like television sets.

True, single genes rarely account for any behavior or trait. An array of coordinated genes is required to explain even the minutest human phenomenon. "Discoveries" of a "gambling gene" here and an "aggression gene" there are derided by the more serious and less publicity-prone scholars. Yet, it would seem that even complex behaviors such as risk taking, reckless driving, and compulsive shopping have genetic underpinnings.

What about the Narcissistic Personality Disorder?

It would seem reasonable to assume - though, at this stage, there is not a shred of proof - that the narcissist is born with a propensity to develop narcissistic defenses. These are triggered by abuse or trauma during the formative years in infancy or during early adolescence (see <http://samvak.tripod.com/faq64.html>). By "abuse" I am referring to a spectrum of behaviors which objectifies the child and treats it as an extension of the caregiver (parent) or an instrument. Dotting and smothering are as much abuse as beating and starving. And abuse can be dished out by peers as well as by adult role models.

Still, I would have to attribute the development of NPD mostly to nurture. The Narcissistic Personality Disorder is an extremely complex battery of phenomena: behavior patterns, cognitions, emotions, conditioning, and so on. NPD is a PERSONALITY disorder and even the most ardent proponents of the school of genetics do not attribute the development of the whole personality to genes.

Narcissists often quote themselves, so allow me to conform to form.

From "The Interrupted Self" (<http://samvak.tripod.com/sacks.html>):

""Organic' and 'mental' disorders (a dubious distinction at best) have many characteristics in common (confabulation, antisocial behavior, emotional absence or flatness, indifference, psychotic episodes and so on)."

From "On Dis-ease" (<http://samvak.tripod.com/disease.html>):

"Moreover, the distinction between the psychic and the physical is hotly disputed, philosophically. The psychophysical problem is as intractable today as it ever was (if not more so). It is beyond doubt that the physical affects the mental and the other way around. This is what disciplines like psychiatry are all about. The ability to control "autonomous" bodily functions (such as heartbeat) and mental reactions to pathogens of the brain are proof of the artificialness of this distinction.

It is a result of the reductionist view of nature as divisible and summable. The sum of the parts, alas, is not always the whole and there is no such thing as an infinite set of the rules of nature, only an asymptotic approximation of it. The distinction between the patient and the outside world is superfluous and wrong. The patient AND his environment are ONE and the same. Disease is a perturbation in the operation and management of the complex ecosystem known as patient-world. Humans absorb their environment and feed it in equal measures. This on-going interaction IS the patient. We cannot exist without the intake of water, air, visual stimuli and food. Our environment is defined by our actions and output, physical and mental.

Thus, one must question the classical differentiation between "internal" and "external". Some illnesses are considered "endogenic" (=generated from the inside). Natural, "internal", causes - a heart defect, a biochemical imbalance, a genetic mutation, a metabolic process gone awry - cause disease. Aging and deformities also belong in this category.

In contrast, problems of nurturance and environment - early childhood abuse, for instance, or malnutrition - are "external" and so are the "classical" pathogens (germs and viruses) and accidents.

But this, again, is a counter-productive approach. Exogenic and Endogenic pathogenesis is inseparable. Mental states increase or decrease the susceptibility to externally induced disease. Talk therapy or abuse (external events) alter the biochemical balance of the brain. The inside constantly interacts with the outside and is so intertwined with it that all distinctions between them are artificial and misleading. The best example is, of course, medication: it is an external agent, it influences internal processes and it has a very strong mental correlate (=its efficacy is influenced by mental factors as in the placebo effect).

The very nature of dysfunction and sickness is highly culture-dependent. Societal parameters dictate right and wrong in health (especially mental health). It is all a matter of statistics. Certain diseases are accepted in certain parts of the world as a fact of life or even a sign of distinction (e.g., the paranoid schizophrenic as chosen by the gods). If there is no disease there is no disease. That the physical or mental state of a person CAN be different - does not imply that it MUST be different or even that it is desirable that it should be different. In an over-populated world, sterility might be the desirable thing - or even the occasional epidemic. There is no such thing as ABSOLUTE dysfunction. The body and the mind ALWAYS function. They adapt themselves to their environment and if the latter changes - they change. Personality disorders are the best possible responses to abuse. Cancer may be the best possible response to carcinogens. Aging and death are definitely the best possible response to over-population. Perhaps the point of view of the single patient is incommensurate with the [point of view of his species](#) - but this should not serve to obscure the issues and derail rational debate.

(continued below)

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As a result, it is logical to introduce the notion of "positive aberration". Certain hyper- or hypo- functioning can yield positive results and prove to be adaptive. The difference between positive and negative aberrations can never be "objective". Nature is morally-neutral and embodies no "values" or "preferences". It simply exists. WE, humans, introduce our value systems, prejudices and priorities into our activities, science included. It is better to be healthy, we say, because we feel better when we are healthy. Circularity aside - this is the only criterion that we can reasonably employ. If the patient feels good - it is not a disease, even if we all think it is. If the patient feels bad, ego-dystonic, unable to function - it is a disease, even when we all think it isn't. Needless to say that I am referring to that mythical creature, the fully informed patient. If someone is sick and knows no better (has never been healthy) - then his decision should be respected only after he is given the chance to experience health.

All the attempts to introduce "objective" yardsticks of health are plagued and philosophically contaminated by the insertion of values, preferences and priorities into the formula - or by subjecting the formula to them altogether. One such attempt is to define health as "an increase in order or efficiency of processes" as contrasted with illness which is "a decrease in order (=increase of entropy) and in the efficiency of processes". While being factually disputable, this dyad also suffers from a series of implicit value-judgements. For instance, why should we prefer life over death? Order to entropy? Efficiency to inefficiency?"

I strongly recommend this paper, by the way:

Liveslye, W.J., Jank, K.L., Jackson, B.N., Vernon, P.A.. 1993. Genetic and environmental contributions to dimensions of personality disorders. Am. J. Psychiatry. 150(O12):1826-31.

Stephen:

Are there Social causes?

I believe personality is independent of intelligence and of genetics. I agree with Freudians and post Freudians that personality is a part of our natural development. The 'self' that we call ourselves is based on this thing we call our personality. Heinz Kohut did some amazing work on self and narcissism. As I understand Kohut theories, our mothers (and to some degree our fathers) give us 'selves' by mirroring back to us when we are babies. In my natural understanding of babies, I see them as pure narcissists much like aliens who see themselves as the center of the universe and who consider everything outside themselves as part of themselves.

As a parent I have seen narcissistic babies grow and explore till they reach the terrible twos, the age where they seem to wake up and discover, to their great discomfort, that they are not the center of the universe. I remember going to the local park where a mother asked me if my son would bite her if she took away the toy my son had 'borrowed' from her own child. Only then did I realize that this behavior was common till a certain age. Children go from a stage of thinking everything belongs to them to suddenly realizing that no, certain toys belong to others; this is a rude shock. Witness the huge rages two and three year olds go through! This awareness of boundaries is the beginning of 'humanity', I believe. In other words, the child suddenly realizes he or she is separate from others, and that other children and adults are separate from them; in other words the child no longer sees the world as his or her oyster. No doubt Piaget has much to say on this, as he categorized the stages of child learning.

Somewhere and at some time in our natural development arises the notion of 'empathy' or awareness of the other. I believe this has also called 'theory of mind' in that the child, and in some cases animals, understand what other people are feeling and even thinking.

In a recent article in Psychological Science by David R. Forman and collaborators, entitled 'Toddler's Responsive Imitation Predicts Preschool-Age Conscience', he posits an interesting theory based on research that babies who mimic their care givers have a higher sense of moral values when tested at a more advanced age. It seems that monkey see monkey do holds true for humans in that the mirroring that naturally occurs between mother and baby (and fathers) can predict how they will behave later; the babies who failed to mimic or who were more self absorbed were noted as being less empathetic and more prone to 'cheat' on the simple tests they were given. No data was given as to how these children fared later but my guess is that the more empathetic children stayed that way and vice versa. If we view this study under the filter of narcissism, we might conclude that narcissistic parents may raise narcissistic babies, or that self-centered babies may stay self-centered as they grow up. As most babies are narcissistic (according to my own theory) then the process of weaning them from this mind set to a more empathetic personality may very be the result of 'good' parenting.

Again the slippery slope of blaming our parents for our 'personality' and thus mental disorders may lead us to believe that narcissism is learned at our mother's breast. Our parents' ills and failings sometimes bypass us, despite all the bad habits they have, and children do grow up 'normal'. I believe Ann Landers 12 rules of raising children are still as valid now as when she first published them in her nationally syndicated column (they can be found on the internet, I am sure).

The second time that narcissistic behavior develops in children is in adolescence when they pass into the penumbra of not children not adulthood. Hormones play a role in how girls and boys suddenly change both physically and mentally. Girls are known to suddenly want to either become veterinarians or models.

Boys try to choose between firemen and soldiers. Of course this is a gross over exaggeration, but parents who have teenagers may see my point. This indeterminate time in a person life can bring out narcissistic tendencies; girls who suddenly garner the attention of males may enjoy this new situation, and it may go to their heads. Boys who are respond to testosterone by testing themselves against their fellow males/rivals can also feel their egos inflated or deflated. Fortunately for most of us, but not all, the passage into adulthood finally ends and the habits that were once condoned, are forgotten and left behind.

But there are still adult men and women who never quite get over their adolescent years and try to prolong them till they die. Are they NPDs, these eternal adolescents?

Sibling rivalry also plays a role in how we develop as individuals as books on birth order try to justify.

Therefore I conclude that the development of humans includes narcissistic tendencies that are useful and natural. Only when the individual gets stuck into an endless food back loop, where they no longer change or develop, do we see something that is called Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

Is Cultural to blame?

At the risk of offending many cultures, I would say that many different peoples often encourage narcissistic behavior. By this I mean the behaviors characterized by selfishness and self-centered behavior. No doubt there are good reasons for this behavior, historical, sexual or whatever, still it comes from the need to survive. Cover your own back is a good piece of advice. But as E. O.

Wilson has pointed out in such seminal works as *Consilience*, altruism is a survival technique as well. Charity and generosity are often seen as signs of weakness when they are really the domains of the truly powerful. By powerful, I do not mean the rich. On the contrary, I have seen more giving amongst the poor than amongst the rich. A rich man or woman counts every penny they give and receive, while the poor is happy to be alive. True, there are Bill Gates and other philanthropic millionaires but most do not become rich by sharing the wealth despite Reaganomic theory of the 'trickle down' effect.

Personal development dependency on culture is the basis for many theologies and political movements. Granted we are all part of our culture, or our human environment, but take someone from one culture and plop them into another and most people will adapt, if not thrive. To say we are encased or enslaved by what happens around us, how other people act, is an easy out of personal responsibility. Children usually follow the orders, spoken and unspoken, of their parents, but when they are cut loose from parental administration; they go their own way. If they have developed some good morals and decision making ability they will not be swayed by others, or by their culture. Of course this is impossible to do, as culture is an ever-present force, like gravity, and those who ignore it are bound to fall. To escape this gravity (an idea that I discovered in *Dinosaur Brains*; *Dealing with All those impossible People at Work* by Dr. Albert J. Bernstein and Sydney Craft) is difficult. It can be done.

To say that one has to drive badly because everyone on the highway drives badly is childish and nonsensical; even though it is tempting. On the other hand, to ignore how other drivers drive is also dangerous. We have to adapt to survive. Perhaps a narcissist will say he or she drives badly because everyone else is, although most judges will throw this defense out of a court of law. The blame other defense is an easy out, one that children often take because they know no better. Dr Stephen Covey's first habit of highly effective people says, "We are responsible for our own choices and have the freedom to choose, based on principles and values rather than moods and conditions. Proactive people choose not to be victims or to blame others." This could be applied to NPDs and their victims.

Alloplastic Defenses?

Is this why this disorder exists? Just because the world has dealt you a bad hand of cards, you have to play anyway, and we all loose in the end. If life gives you lemons, make lemonade. No doubt you will say my homespun humor and sayings are off the target, yet they contain a grain of the truth. Narcissist was a legend in his own time - in ancient Greece - because this disorder is probably as old as humankind. It is part of what makes us human. To say we 'suddenly' are living in a narcissistic culture is to belie all of human history that tells the stories of narcissists who have struggled to do and bad. Great leaders need a pinch of narcissism, but too much spoils the meal. I fact all of us need a little narcissism in our psyches to balance out our personality. But when we suddenly think we are the star of the

show, the only one in the world, then we begin to show signs of NPD; as to the origin of this there are many as I have detailed in the above text.

So to answer your question, I would say yes to all of what you asked.

Wednesday, January 12, 2005, Seventh Letter to Sam

Dear Sam,

We were on the subject of what motivates a narcissist in our last interchange, and I tried to give you an answer in my last letter. As you know I will always harp on the other side of the coin "the victim" because they (we) deserve attention. Therefore I will continue to insist on coming back to the victims and not keep the NPD as the center of attention - a position they love to reserve to themselves.

You stated that a NPD will take any kind of supply, any victim will do, and so there is no set profile for a NPD supply victim. I beg to differ. You are also right, Sam, when you said in [letter 4](#) that The healthier the potential prey, the more he or she are able to resist the narcissist's lure. You also did a great job of describing how the partner/victim acts under the power of a NPD in [letter 2](#). NPDs need attention of any kind, good or bad, and will take any type of supply. I assume that hell for a NPD is a deserted island? To beat a dead dog, as the saying goes, I would like to explore the dynamics of victims and why they fall for the NPD.

What can we learn from Sadomasochists?

N.B. I do not endorse or approve of the BDSM scene that insist that it only takes place between consenting adults.

Perhaps the study of an extreme group of people can give us some insight into why this dyad of NPD/victim comes about. What's in it for either party? You may or may not be familiar with the BDSM crowd - otherwise known as sadists and masochists - that are forms of algolagnia, the love of pain. It is a type of paraphilia. More information here at the Wikepeida, free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraphilia#External_link Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing invented the word sadist which he named after the Marquis de Sade who was known for his extreme perversions.

I would propose another type of paraphilia; NPD-philia where the victim loves being abused by a NPD. It would compare it to hybristophilia: the sexual arousal and attention paid to people who have committed crimes, in particular cruel or outrageous crimes. Even though you wrote in a letter that the victim could walk away, I would beg to differ. Most victims can walk away if they have a normal psyche. But those who suffer from the need for pain, confusing it with love and pleasure, need their source of love/pain. The source of love/pain is the NPD who supplies it in spades to his or her victim. In psychological terms this is called dependency, or - if you will - addiction to the NPD. Co-dependency is something that can be treated if recognized by the victim, but if the victim feels complete, like an addict getting high, how can we disabuse the victim of the problem? (Think about someone who is in love, love is blind, and blinding!) More on [The pain of victims](#).

By studying such extreme groups we may gain insights into the mundane everyday abuse that goes on in a NPD/victim situation. Let us compare them. Most BDSM dyads are consensual,

meaning that both people are aware of the parameters of what is going on and may even sign contracts to limit what can and cannot be done. In a NPD abuse situation, the victim is often clueless as to what is going on and may later seek another abusing NPD to further the abuse.

From my reading into this SM life style, they have not been abused as children (so they say) and seek something that they cannot obtain in normal relationships. This may be where the NPD and BDSM situations coincide; in both situations one person wants to have power over another and they both derive some pleasure in the interaction. Most NPD victims will never admit it, but many of them were charmed by their NPD master/mistress into a relationship that soon turned dark and dismal. If they kept coming back for abuse, the NPD victim then takes on responsibility for this situation. (It always fascinated me that many rape victims blamed themselves for being raped, even when rape victim was totally innocent and the rapist was a monster.) Why do we give people (i.e. NPDs) too much benefit of the doubt? There is an element of the Stockholm syndrome.

Once the pattern of submission starts, in a SM or a NPD relationship, there is a dynamic of needs and supply that is exchanged. Again I think that the mental games that go on in both relationships bare study. What does each party get out of this play? In sadist masochist play a dominant person will control and humiliate a submission person; both derive pain and pleasure from this role-playing. I have read that they both have a so-called release of tension. In the NPD victim situation, the master NPD dominates and humiliates the victim. Yet it goes beyond what happens in an S and M situation - because it never stops. There is no limit to the abuse a NPD will deal out to gain the pleasure and power they want. Only society and their own fear keep them in check. Most NPDs will not physically hurt their victim; they are too smart for that. Another difference with S and M is the partners accept the physical abuse as something they both need. NPDs could care less about the needs of their victim; they are totally concentrating on their own needs and wants. Only when their victim starts to leave the relationship does the NPD start the charm game again.

NPDs love controlling people, keeping them dependant or amused, because that ignorance insures that the narcissistic supply continues to flow. If the victim is a co-dependant, or masochist, then the task is easier. You are right that the NPD will take any source of supply; the quality of supply can vary, but it has to be there. As I said before, I imagine that the worst thing you could do to a NPD would be to put them on an island by themselves where they would have to face their inner emptiness. I have done this with NPD, on a smaller scale, by ignoring them. I watch them go crazy when you treat them as if they are not there. Nothingness for a NPD is not being the center of attention. I have trained NPDs in this manner, by giving them a great deal of attention and then going cold to them, ignoring them. They are the ones who usually play this game and do not expect anyone else, much less their victim, to know how it goes. It is a cruel thing to do but it can also save your soul from being eaten alive by a particular voracious NPD. The down side of this game is that you are still around them, and they may get wise to your ruse. Or you become one. [How to handle a Narcissist](#)

The other downside to playing the game with a NPD is that you are being trained by them to act abnormally. This also serves their needs. They do not want you to be normal, to have normal reactions, because they are not normal, they are more normal. Every NPD action is exaggerated, every emotion is bigger, every need is more important than other people so in the end they are the center of attention; just like a wailing baby who wants to be fed or cuddled.

What we can learn from Pain and suffering on a larger scale [How I understood what was going on](#)

Sam:

Intriguing insights, as usual. Thank you!

No doubt some of the victims find emotional gratification in victimhood. I wrote about masochistic and codependent victims of narcissists extensively.

It takes two to tango – and an equal number to sustain a long-term abusive relationship. The abuser and the abused form a bond, a dynamic, and a dependence. Expressions such as "folie a deux" and the "[Stockholm Syndrome](#)" capture facets – two of a myriad – of this danse macabre. It often ends fatally. It is always an excruciatingly painful affair.

People – overwhelmingly women – remain in an abusive household for a variety of reasons: economic, parental (to protect the children), and psychological. But the objective obstacles facing the battered spouse cannot be overstated.

But, as you point out correctly, there is more to an abusive dyad than mere pecuniary convenience. The abuser – stealthily but unfailingly – exploits the vulnerabilities in the psychological makeup of his victim. The abused party may have low self-esteem, a fluctuating sense of self-worth, primitive defence mechanisms, phobias, mental health problems, a disability, a history of failure, or a tendency to blame herself, or to feel inadequate (autoplastic neurosis). She may have come from an abusive family or environment – which conditioned her to expect abuse as inevitable and "normal". In extreme and rare cases – the victim is a masochist, possessed of an urge to seek ill-treatment and pain.

The abuser may be functional or dysfunctional, a pillar of society, or a peripatetic con-artist, rich or poor, young or old. There is no universally-applicable profile of the "typical abuser". Yet, abusive behavior often indicates serious underlying psychopathologies. Absent empathy, the abuser perceives the abused spouse only dimly and partly, as one would an inanimate source of frustration. The abuser, in his mind, interacts only with himself and with "introjects" – representations of outside objects, such as his victims.

Typically, the abuser succeeds to convert the abused into his worldview. The victim – and his victimizers – don't realize that something is wrong with the relationship. This denial is common and all-pervasive. It permeates other spheres of the abuser's life as well. Such people are often narcissists – steeped in grandiose fantasies, divorced from reality, besotted with their False Self, consumed by feelings of omnipotence, omniscience, entitlement, and paranoia.

Contrary to stereotypes, both the abuser and his prey usually suffer from disturbances in the regulation of their sense of self-worth. Low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence render the abuser – and his confabulated self – vulnerable to criticism, disagreement, exposure, and adversity – real or imagined.

Abuse is bred by fear – fear of being mocked or betrayed, emotional insecurity, anxiety, panic, and apprehension. It is a last ditch effort to exert control – for instance, over one's

spouse – by "annexing" her, "possessing" her, and "punishing" her for being a separate entity, with her own boundaries, needs, feelings, preferences, and dreams.

In her seminal tome, *"The Verbally Abusive Relationship"*, Patricia Evans lists the various forms of manipulation which together constitute verbal and emotional (psychological) abuse:

Withholding (the silent treatment), countering (refuting or invalidating the spouse's statements or actions), discounting (putting down her emotions, possessions, experiences, hopes, and fears), sadistic and brutal humor, blocking (avoiding a meaningful exchange, diverting the conversation, changing the subject), blaming and accusing, judging and criticizing, undermining and sabotaging, threatening, name calling, forgetting and denying, ordering around, denial, and abusive anger.

To these we can add:

Wounding "honesty", ignoring, smothering, dotting, unrealistic expectations, invasion of privacy, tactlessness, sexual abuse, physical maltreatment, humiliating, shaming, insinuating, lying, exploiting, devaluing and discarding, being unpredictable, reacting disproportionately, dehumanizing, objectifying, abusing confidence and intimate information, engineering impossible situations, control by proxy and ambient abuse.

Five years ago, Alice Ratzlaff and myself proposed a new diagnostic category (mental health disorder) which we called ["Inverted Narcissism"](#).

Codependents are people who depend on other people for their emotional gratification and the performance of Ego or daily functions. They are needy, demanding, and submissive. They fear abandonment, cling and display immature behaviours in their effort to maintain the "relationship" with their companion or mate upon whom they depend. No matter what abuse is inflicted upon them – they remain in the relationship. By eagerly becoming victims, codependents seek to control their abusers.

(continued below)

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See also the definition of the [Dependent Personality Disorder](#) in the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual](#) (DSM-IV-TR, 2000).

The Inverted Narcissist, also called "covert narcissist", is a co-dependent who depends exclusively on narcissists (narcissist-co-dependent). If you are living with a narcissist, have a relationship with one, if you are married to one, if you are working with a narcissist, etc. – it does **NOT** mean that you are an inverted narcissist.

To "qualify" as an inverted narcissist, you must **CRAVE** to be in a relationship with a narcissist, regardless of any abuse inflicted on you by him/her. You must **ACTIVELY** seek relationships with narcissists and **ONLY** with narcissists, no matter what your (bitter and traumatic) past experience has been. You must feel **EMPTY** and **UNHAPPY** in relationships with **ANY OTHER** kind of person. Only then, and if you satisfy the other diagnostic criteria of a Dependent Personality Disorder, can you be safely labelled an "inverted narcissist".

Most "classical" (overt) narcissists are counterdependent. Their emotions and needs are buried under "scar tissue" which had formed, coalesced, and hardened during years of one form of abuse or another. Grandiosity, a sense of [entitlement](#), a lack of [empathy](#), and overweening haughtiness usually hide gnawing insecurity and a fluctuating sense of self-worth.

Counterdependents are contumacious ([reject and despise authority](#)), fiercely independent, controlling, self-cantered, and [aggressive](#). They fear intimacy and are locked into cycles of hesitant approach followed by avoidance of commitment. They are "lone wolves" and bad team players.

Counterdependence is a reaction formation. The counterdependent dreads his own weaknesses. He seeks to overcome them by projecting an image of omnipotence, omniscience, success, self-sufficiency, and superiority.

It is clear that there is, indeed, an hitherto neglected type of narcissist. It is the "self-effacing" or "introverted" narcissist. We call it the Inverted Narcissist (hereinafter: IN). Others call it "narcissist-codependent" or "N-magnet" (which erroneously implies passivity and victimhood).

This is a narcissist who, in many respects, is the mirror image of the "classical" narcissist. The psychodynamics of the Inverted Narcissist are not clear, nor are its developmental roots. Perhaps it is the product of an overweening Primary Object or caregiver. Perhaps excessive abuse leads to the repression of even the narcissistic and other defence mechanisms. Perhaps the parents suppress every manifestation of grandiosity (very common in early childhood) and of narcissism – so that the narcissistic defence mechanism is "inverted" and internalised in this unusual form.

These narcissists are self-effacing, sensitive, emotionally fragile, sometimes socially phobic. They derive all their self-esteem and sense of self-worth from the outside (others), are pathologically envious (a [transformation of aggression](#)), are likely to intermittently engage in aggressive/violent behaviours, are more emotionally labile than the classic narcissist, etc.

There are, therefore, three "basic" types of narcissists:

1. ***The offspring of neglecting parents*** – They default to narcissism as the predominant object relation (with themselves as the exclusive love object).
2. ***The offspring of doting or domineering parents (often narcissists themselves)*** – They internalise their parents' voices in the form of a sadistic, ideal, immature Superego and spend their lives trying to be perfect, omnipotent, omniscient and to be judged "a success" by these parent-images and their later representations and substitutes (authority figures).
3. ***The offspring of abusive parents*** – They internalise the abusing, demeaning and contemptuous voices and spend their lives in an effort to elicit "counter-voices" from other people and thus to regulate their labile self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

All three types experience recurrent and Sisyphean failures. Shielded by their defence mechanisms, they constantly gauge reality wrongly, their actions and reactions become more and more rigid and the damage inflicted by them on themselves and on others is ever greater.

The narcissistic parent seems to employ a myriad primitive defences in his dealings with his children:

Splitting – Idealising the child and devaluing him in cycles, which reflect the internal dynamics of the parent rather than anything the child does.

Projective Identification – Forcing the child to behave in a way which vindicates the parent's fears regarding himself or herself, his or her self-image and his or her self-worth. This is a particularly powerful and pernicious mechanism. If the narcissist parent fears his own deficiencies ("defects"), vulnerability, perceived weaknesses, susceptibility, gullibility, or emotions – he is likely to force the child to "feel" these rejected and (to him) repulsive emotions, to behave in ways strongly abhorred by the parent, to exhibit character traits the parent strongly rejects in himself.

Projection - The child, in a way, becomes the "trash bin" of the parents' inhibitions, fears, self-loathing, self-contempt, perceived lack of self-worth, sense of inadequacy, rejected traits, repressed emotions, failures and emotional reticence.

Coupled with the parent's treatment of the child as the parent's extension, these psychological defences totally inhibit the psychological growth and emotional maturation of the child. The child becomes a reflection of the parent, a conduit through which the parent experiences and realises himself for better (hopes, aspirations, ambition, life goals) and for worse (weaknesses, "undesirable" emotions, "negative" traits).

Relationships between [such parents](#) and their progeny easily deteriorate to sexual or other modes of [abuse](#) because there are no functioning boundaries between them.

It seems that the child's reaction to a narcissistic parent can be either accommodation and assimilation or rejection.

Accommodation and Assimilation

The child accommodates, idealises and internalises (introjects) the narcissistic and abusive Primary Object successfully. This means that the child's "internal voice" is also narcissistic and abusive. The child tries to comply with its directives and with its explicit and perceived wishes.

The child becomes a masterful provider of [Narcissistic Supply](#), a perfect match to the parent's personality, an ideal source, an accommodating, understanding and caring caterer to all the needs, whims, mood swings and cycles of the narcissist. The child learns to endure devaluation and idealisation with equanimity and adapt to the narcissist's world view. The child, in short, becomes the ultimate extension. This is what we call an "inverted narcissist".

We must not neglect the abusive aspect of such a relationship. The narcissistic parent always alternates between idealisation and devaluation of his offspring. The child is likely to internalise the devaluing, abusive, critical, demeaning, berating, diminishing, minimising, upbraiding, chastising voices.

The parent (or caregiver) goes on to survive inside the child-turned-adult (as part of a sadistic and ideal Superego and an unrealistic Ego Ideal). These voices are so powerful that they inhibit even the development of reactive narcissism, the child's typical defence mechanism.

The child-turned-adult keeps looking for narcissists in order to feel whole, alive and wanted. He craves to be treated by a narcissist narcissistically. What others call abuse is, to him or her, familiar territory and constitutes Narcissistic Supply. To the Inverted Narcissist, the classic narcissist is a Source of Supply (primary or secondary) and his narcissistic behaviours constitute Narcissistic Supply. The IN feels dissatisfied, empty and unwanted when not "loved" by a narcissist.

The roles of Primary Source of Narcissistic Supply (PSNS) and Secondary Source of Narcissistic Supply (SSNS) are reversed. To the inverted narcissist, her narcissistic spouse is a Source of **PRIMARY** Narcissistic Supply.

The child can also reject the narcissistic parent rather than accommodate her or him.

Rejection

The child may react to the narcissism of the Primary Object with a peculiar type of rejection. He develops his own narcissistic personality, replete with grandiosity and lack of empathy – but his personality is antithetical to that of the narcissistic parent.

If the parent were a somatic narcissist, the child is likely to grow up to be a cerebral one. If his father prided himself being virtuous, the son turns out sinful. If his narcissistic mother bragged about her frugality, he is bound to profligately flaunt his wealth.

An Attempted DSM Style List of Criteria

It is possible to compose a DSM-IV-TR-like set of criteria for the Inverted Narcissist, using the classic narcissists' as a template. The two are, in many ways, two sides of the same coin, or "the mould and the moulded" - hence the neologisms "mirror narcissist" or "inverted narcissist".

The narcissist tries to merge with an idealised but badly internalised object. He does so by "digesting" the meaningful others in his life and transforming them into extensions of his self. He uses various techniques to achieve this. To the "digested", this is the crux of the harrowing experience called "life with a narcissist".

The "inverted narcissist" (IN), on the other hand, does not attempt, except in fantasy or in dangerous, masochistic sexual practice, to merge with an idealised external object. This is because he so successfully internalised the narcissistic Primary Object to the exclusion of all else. The IN feels ill at ease in his relationships with non-narcissists because it is unconsciously perceived by him to constitute "betrayal", "cheating", an abrogation of the exclusivity clause he has with the narcissistic Primary Object.

This is the big difference between narcissists and their inverted version.

Classic narcissists of all stripes reject the Primary Object in particular (and object relations in general) in favour of a handy substitute: themselves.

Inverted Narcissists accept the (narcissist) Primary Object and internalise it – to the exclusion of all others (unless they are perceived to be faithful renditions, replicas of the narcissistic Primary Object).

Criterion ONE

Possesses a rigid sense of lack of self-worth.

The classic narcissist has a badly regulated sense of self-worth. However this is not conscious. He goes through [cycles](#) of self-devaluation (and experiences them as dysphorias).

The IN's sense of self-worth does not fluctuate. It is rather stable – but it is very low. Whereas the narcissist devalues others – the IN devalues himself as an offering, a sacrifice to the narcissist. The IN pre-emptively devalues himself, by actively berating his own achievements, or talents. The IN is exceedingly distressed when singled out because of actual accomplishments or a demonstration of superior skills.

The inverted narcissist is compelled to filter all of her narcissistic needs through the primary narcissist in her life. Independence or personal autonomy are not permitted. The IN feels amplified by the narcissist's running commentary (because nothing can be accomplished by the invert without the approval of a primary narcissist in their lives).

Criterion TWO

Pre-occupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance and beauty or of an ideal of love.

This is the same as the DSM-IV-TR criterion for Narcissistic Personality Disorder but, with the IN, it manifests absolutely differently, i.e. the cognitive dissonance is sharper here because the IN is so absolutely and completely convinced of their worthlessness that these fantasies of grandeur are extremely painful "dissonances".

With the narcissist, the dissonance exists on two levels:

Between the unconscious feeling of lack of stable self-worth and the grandiose fantasies

AND between the grandiose fantasies and reality (the Grandiosity Gap).

In comparison, the Inverted Narcissist can only vacillate between lack of self-worth and reality. No grandiosity is permitted, except in dangerous, forbidden fantasy. This shows that the Invert is psychologically incapable of fully realising her inherent potentials without a primary narcissist to filter the praise, adulation or accomplishments through. She must have someone to whom praise can be redirected. The dissonance between the IN's certainty of self-worthlessness and genuine praise that cannot be deflected is likely to emotionally derail the Inverted Narcissist every time.

Criterion THREE

Believes that she is absolutely un-unique and un-special (i.e., worthless and not worthy of merger with the fantasised ideal) and that no one at all could understand her because she is innately unworthy of being understood. The IN becomes very agitated the more one tries to understand her because that also offends against her righteous sense of being properly excluded from the human race.

A sense of worthlessness is typical of many other PDs (as well as the feeling that no one could ever understand them). The narcissist herself endures prolonged periods of self-devaluation, self-deprecation and self-effacement. This is part of the [Narcissistic Cycle](#). In this sense, the inverted narcissist is a partial narcissist. She is permanently fixated in a part of the narcissistic cycle, never to experience its complementary half: the narcissistic grandiosity and sense of entitlement.

The "righteous sense of being properly excluded" comes from the sadistic Superego in concert with the "overbearing, externally reinforced, conscience".

Criterion FOUR

Demands anonymity (in the sense of seeking to remain excluded at all costs) and is intensely irritated and uncomfortable with any attention being paid to her – similar to the [Schizoid PD](#).

Criterion FIVE

Feels that she is undeserving and not entitled.

Feels that she is inferior to others, lacking, insubstantial, unworthy, unlikable, unappealing, unlovable, someone to scorn and dismiss, or to ignore.

Criterion SIX

Is extinguishingly selfless, sacrificial, even unctuous in her interpersonal relationships and avoids the assistance of others at all costs. Can only interact with others when she can be seen to be giving, supportive, and expending an unusual effort to assist.

Some narcissists behave the [same way](#) but only as a means to obtain Narcissistic Supply (praise, adulation, affirmation, attention). This must not be confused with the behaviour of the IN.

Criterion SEVEN

Lacks empathy. Is intensely attuned to others' needs, but only in so far as it relates to her own need to perform the required self-sacrifice, which in turn is necessary in order for the IN to obtain her Narcissistic Supply from the primary narcissist.

By contrast, narcissists are never empathic. They are intermittently attuned to others only in order to optimise the extraction of Narcissistic Supply from them.

Criterion EIGHT

Envies others. Cannot conceive of being envied and becomes extremely agitated and uncomfortable if even brought into a situation where comparison might occur. Loathes competition and avoids competition at all costs, if there is any chance of actually winning the competition, or being singled out.

Criterion NINE

Displays extreme shyness, lack of any real relational connections, is publicly self-effacing in the extreme, is internally highly moralistic and critical of others; is a perfectionist and engages in lengthy ritualistic behaviours, which can never be perfectly performed ([obsessive-compulsive](#), though not necessarily to the full extent exhibited in Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder). Notions of being individualistic are anathema.

The Reactive Patterns of the Inverted Narcissist (IN)

The Inverted Narcissist does not suffer from a "milder" form of narcissism. Like the "classic" narcissists, it has degrees and shades. But it is much more rare and the DSM-IV-TR variety is the more prevalent.

The Inverted Narcissist is liable to react with rage whenever threatened, or...

...When envious of other people's achievements, their ability to feel wholeness, happiness, rewards and successes, when her sense of self-worthlessness is diminished by a behaviour, a comment, an event, when her lack of self-worth and voided self-esteem is threatened. Thus, this type of narcissist might surprisingly react violently or wrathfully to **GOOD** things: a kind remark, a mission accomplished, a reward, a compliment, a proposition, or a sexual advance.

...When thinking about the past, when emotions and memories are evoked (usually negative ones) by certain music, a given smell, or sight.

...When her pathological envy leads to an all-pervasive sense of injustice and being discriminated against or deprived by a spiteful world.

...When she comes across stupidity, avarice, dishonesty, bigotry – it is these qualities in herself that all types of narcissists really fear and reject so vehemently in others.

...When she believes that she failed (and she always entertains this belief), that she is imperfect and useless and worthless, a good for nothing half-baked creature.

...When she realises to what extent her inner demons possess her, constrain her life, torment her, deform her and the hopelessness of it all.

When the Inverted Narcissist rages, she becomes verbally and emotionally abusive. She uncannily spots and attacks the vulnerabilities of her target, and mercilessly drives home the poisoned dagger of despair and self-loathing until it infects her adversary.

The calm after such a storm is even eerier, a thundering silence. The Inverted Narcissist regrets her behaviour and admits her feelings while apologising profusely.

The Inverted Narcissist nurtures her negative emotions as yet another weapon of [self-destruction and self-defeat](#). It is from this repressed self-contempt and sadistic self-judgement that the narcissistic rage springs forth.

One important difference between Inverted Narcissists and non-narcissists is that the former are less likely to react with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) following the breakup of their relationships with a their narcissists. They seem to be "desensitised" to narcissists by their early upbringing.

Whereas the reactions of normal people to narcissistic behaviour patterns (and especially to the splitting and projective identification defence mechanisms and to the idealisation devaluation cycles) is shock, profound hurt and disorientation – inverted narcissists show none of the above.

The Life of the Inverted Narcissist

The IN is, usually, exceedingly and painfully shy as a child. Despite this social phobia, his grandiosity (absorbed from the parent) might direct him to seek "limelight" professions and occupations, which involve exposure, competition, "stage fright" and social friction.

The setting can vary from the limited (family) to the expansive (national media) – but, whatever it is, the result is constant conflict and feelings of discomfort, even terror and extreme excitement and thrill ("[adrenaline rush](#)"). This is because the IN's grandiosity is "imported" and not fully integrated. It is, therefore, not supportive of his "grandiose" pursuits (as is the case with the narcissist). On the contrary, the IN feels awkward, pitted on the edge of a precipice, contrived, false and misleading, not to say deceitful.

The Inverted Narcissist grows up in a stifling environment, whether it is an orthodox, hyper-religious, collectivist, or traditionalist culture, a monovalent, "black and white", doctrinarian and indoctrinating society – or a family which manifests all the above in a microcosm all its own.

The Inverted Narcissist is cast in a negative (emergent) role within his family. His "negativity" is attributed to her gender, the order of her birth, religious, social, or cultural dictates and commandments, her "character flaws", her relation to a specific person or event, her acts or inaction and so on.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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In the words of one such IN:

"In the religious culture I grew up in, women are SO suppressed, their roles are so carefully restricted. They are the representation, in the flesh, of all that is sinful, degrading, of all that is wrong with the world.

These are the negative gender/cultural images that were force fed to us the negative 'otherness' of women, as defined by men, was fed to me. I was so shy, withdrawn, unable to really relate to people at all from as early as I can remember."

The IN is subjected and exposed either to an overbearing, overvalued parent, or to an aloof, detached, emotionally unavailable one – or to both – at an early stage of his life.

"I grew up in the shadow of my father who adored me, put me on a pedestal, told me I could do or be anything I wanted because I was incredibly bright, BUT, he ate me alive, I was his property and an extension of him. I also grew up with the mounting hatred of my narcissist brother who got none of this attention from our father and got no attention from our mother either. My function was to make my father look wonderful in the eyes of all outsiders, the wonderful parent with a genius Wunderkind as his last child, and the only child of the six that he was physically present to raise from the get go. The overvaluation combined with being abjectly ignored or raged at by him when I stepped out of line even the tiniest bit, was enough to warp my personality."

The Invert is prevented from developing full-blown secondary narcissism. The Invert is so heavily preoccupied in his or her pre-school years with satisfying the narcissistic parent, that the traits of grandiosity and self-love, even the need for Narcissistic Supply, remain dormant or repressed.

The Invert simply "knows" that only the narcissistic parent can provide the requisite amount of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissistic parent is so controlling that any attempt to garner praise or adulation from any other source (without the approval of the parent) is severely

punished by swift devaluation and even the occasional spanking or abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual).

This is a vital part of the conditioning that gives rise to inverted narcissism. Where the narcissist exhibits grandiosity, the Invert is intensely uncomfortable with personal praise, and wishes to always divert praise away from himself onto his narcissist. This is why the IN can only truly feel anything when she is in a relationship with another narcissist. The IN is conditioned and programmed from the very beginning to be the perfect companion to the narcissist. To feed his Ego, to be purely his extension, to seek only praise and adulation if it brings greater praise and adulation to her narcissist.

Most narcissists enjoy an irrational and brief burst of relief after having suffered emotionally ("[narcissistic injury](#)") or after having sustained a loss. It is a sense of freedom, which comes with being unshackled. Having lost everything, the narcissist often feels that he has found himself, that he has been re-born, that he has been charged with natal energy, able to take on new challenges and to explore new territories. This elation is so addictive, that the narcissist often seeks pain, humiliation, punishment, scorn, and contempt - as long as they are public and involve the attention of peers and superiors. Being punished accords with the tormenting inner voices of the narcissist which keep telling him that he is bad, corrupt, and worthy of penalty.

This is the masochistic streak in the narcissist. But the narcissist is also a sadist - albeit an unusual one.

The narcissist inflicts pain and abuse on others. He devalues Sources of Supply, callously and off-handedly abandons them, and discards people, places, partnerships, and friendships unhesitatingly. Some narcissists - though by no means the majority - actually **ENJOY** abusing, taunting, tormenting, and freakishly controlling others ("gaslighting"). But most of them do these things absentmindedly, automatically, and, often, even without good reason.

What is unusual about the narcissist's sadistic behaviors - premeditated acts of tormenting others while enjoying their anguished reactions - is that they are goal orientated. "Pure" sadists have no goal in mind except the pursuit of pleasure - pain as an art form (remember the Marquis de Sade?). The narcissist, on the other hand, haunts and hunts his victims for a reason - he wants them to reflect his inner state. It is all part of a mechanism called "Projective Identification".

When the narcissist is angry, unhappy, disappointed, injured, or hurt - he feels unable to express his emotions sincerely and openly since to do so would be to admit his frailty, his neediness, and his weaknesses. He deplores his own humanity - his emotions, his vulnerability, his susceptibility, his gullibility, his inadequacies, and his failures. So, he makes use of other people to express his pain and his frustration, his pent up anger and his aggression. He achieves this by mentally torturing other people to the point of madness, by driving them to violence, by reducing them to scar tissue in search of outlet, closure, and, sometimes, revenge. He forces people to lose their own character traits - and adopt his own instead. In reaction to his constant and well-targeted abuse, they become abusive, vengeful, ruthless, lacking empathy, obsessed, and aggressive. They mirror him faithfully and thus relieve him of the need to express himself directly.

Having constructed this writhing hall of human mirrors, the narcissist withdraws. The goal achieved, he lets go. As opposed to the sadist, he is no in it, indefinitely, for the pleasure of it. He abuses and traumatizes, humiliates and abandons, discards and ignores, insults and provokes - only for the purpose of purging his inner demons. By possessing others, he purifies himself, cathartically, and exorcises his demented self.

This accomplished, he acts almost with remorse. An episode of extreme abuse is followed by an act of great care and by mellifluous apologies. The Narcissistic Pendulum swings between the extremes of torturing others and empathically soothing the resulting pain. This incongruous behavior, these "sudden" shifts between sadism and altruism, abuse and "love", ignoring and caring, abandoning and clinging, viciousness and remorse, the harsh and the tender - are, perhaps, the most difficult to comprehend and to accept. These swings produce in people around the narcissist emotional insecurity, an eroded sense of self-worth, fear, stress, and anxiety ("walking on eggshells"). Gradually, emotional paralysis ensues and they come to occupy the same emotional wasteland inhabited by the narcissist, his prisoners and hostages in more ways than one - and even when he is long out of their life.

The narcissist simply discards people when he becomes convinced that they can no longer provide him with [Narcissistic Supply](#). This conviction, subjective and emotionally charged, does not have to be grounded in reality. Suddenly – because of [boredom](#), [disagreement](#), disillusion, a fight, an act, inaction, or a [mood](#) – the narcissist wildly swings from idealisation to devaluation.

The narcissist then detaches immediately. He needs all the energy he can muster to obtain new Sources of Narcissistic Supply and would rather not spend these scarce resources over what he regards as human refuse, the waste left after the extraction of Narcissistic Supply.

A narcissist would tend to display the sadistic aspect of his personality in one of two cases:

1. That the very acts of sadism generate Narcissistic Supply to be consumed by the narcissist ("I inflict pain, therefore I am superior"), or
2. That the victims of his sadism are still his only or major Sources of Narcissistic Supply but are perceived by him to be intentionally frustrating and withholding. Sadistic acts are his way of punishing them for not being docile, obedient, admiring and adoring as he expects them to be in view of his uniqueness, cosmic significance, and special entitlement.

Because of his lack of empathy and his rigid personality, the narcissist often inflicts great (physical or mental) pain on meaningful others in his life – and he enjoys their writhing and suffering. In this restricted sense he is a sadist.

To support his sense of uniqueness, greatness and (cosmic) significance, he is often hypervigilant. If he falls from grace – he attributes it to dark forces out to destroy him. If his sense of entitlement is not satisfied and he is ignored by others – he attributes it to the fear and inferiority that he provokes in them. So, to some extent, he is a paranoid.

The narcissist is as much an artist of pain as any sadist. The difference between them lies in their motivation. The narcissist tortures and abuses as means to punish and to reassert superiority, omnipotence, and grandiosity. The sadist does it for pure (usually, sexually-

tinged) pleasure. But both are adept at finding the chinks in people's armours. Both are ruthless and venomous in the pursuit of their prey. Both are unable to empathise with their victims, self-centred, and rigid.

The narcissist [abuses his victim](#) verbally, mentally, or physically (often, in all three ways). He infiltrates her defences, shatters her self-confidence, confuses and confounds her, demeans and debases her. He invades her territory, abuses her confidence, exhausts her resources, hurts her loved ones, threatens her stability and security, enmeshes her in his [paranoid state of mind](#), frightens her out of her wits, withholds love and sex from her, prevents satisfaction and causes frustration, humiliates and insults her privately and in public, points out her shortcomings, criticises her profusely and in a "scientific and objective" manner – and this is a partial list.

Very often, the narcissist's sadistic acts are disguised as an enlightened interest in the welfare of his victim. He plays the psychiatrist to her psychopathology (totally dreamt up by him). He acts the [guru](#), the avuncular or father figure, the teacher, the only true friend, the old and the experienced. All this in order to weaken her defences and to lay siege to her disintegrating nerves. So subtle and poisonous is the narcissistic variant of sadism that it might well be regarded as the most dangerous of all.

Luckily, the narcissist's attention span is short and his resources and energy limited. In constant, effort-consuming and attention-diverting pursuit of Narcissistic Supply, the narcissist lets his victim go, usually before it has suffered irreversible damage. The victim is then free to rebuild her life from ruins. Not an easy undertaking, this – but far better than the total obliteration which awaits the victims of the "true" sadist.

If one had to distil the quotidian existence of the narcissist in two pithy sentences, one would say:

The narcissist loves to be hated and hates to be loved.

Hate is the complement of fear and narcissists like being feared. It imbues them with an intoxicating sensation of omnipotence.

Many of them are veritably inebriated by the looks of horror or repulsion on people's faces: "They know that I am capable of anything."

The sadistic narcissist perceives himself as Godlike, ruthless and unscrupulous, capricious and unfathomable, devoid of emotions and asexual, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, a plague, a devastation, an inescapable verdict.

He nurtures his ill-repute, stoking it and fanning the flames of gossip. It is an enduring asset. Hate and fear are sure-fire generators of attention. It is all about Narcissistic Supply, of course – the drug which narcissists consume and which consumes them in return.

Deep inside, it is the horrid future and inescapable punishment that await the narcissist that are irresistibly appealing. Sadists are often also masochists. In sadistic narcissists, there is, actually, a burning desire – nay, need – to be punished. In the grotesque mind of the narcissist, his punishment is equally his vindication.

By being permanently on trial, the narcissist defiantly claims the high moral ground and the position of the martyr: misunderstood, discriminated against, unjustly roughed, outcast due to his very towering genius or other outstanding qualities.

To conform to the cultural stereotype of the "[tormented artist](#)", the narcissist provokes his own suffering. He is thus validated. His grandiose fantasies acquire a modicum of substance. "If I were not so special, they surely wouldn't have persecuted me so." The persecution of the narcissist proves his uniqueness. To "deserve" or provoke it, he must be different, for better or for worse.

The narcissist's aforementioned streak of paranoia makes his persecution inevitable. The narcissist is in constant conflict with "lesser beings": his spouse, his shrink, his boss, his colleagues, the police, the courts, his neighbours. Forced to stoop to their intellectual level, the narcissist feels like Gulliver: a giant shackled by Lilliputians. His life is a constant struggle against the self-contented mediocrity of his milieu. This is his fate which he accepts, though never stoically. It is his calling and the mission of his stormy life.

Deeper still, the narcissist has an image of himself as a worthless, bad and dysfunctional extension of others. In constant need of Narcissistic Supply, he feels humiliated by his dependency. The contrast between his grandiose fantasies and the reality of his habit, neediness and, often, failure (the Grandiosity Gap) is an emotionally corroding experience. It is a perpetual background noise of devilish, demeaning scorn. His inner voices "say" to him: "You are a fraud", "You are a zero", "You deserve nothing", "If only they knew how worthless you are".

The narcissist attempts to silence these tormenting voices not by fighting them but by agreeing with them. Unconsciously – sometimes consciously – he "responds" to them: "I do agree with you. I am bad and worthless and deserving of the most severe punishment for my rotten character, bad habits, addiction and the constant fakery that is my life. I will go out and seek my doom. Now that I have complied – will you leave me alone? Will you let me be?"

Of course, they never do.

And how do the victims react to all this?

I disagree with you that most victims are Inverted Narcissists (NPD-philes) or masochists. Having corresponded with thousands of victims since 1996, I can safely say that the vast majority of them are unhappy and want out - desperately.

Living with a narcissist is living in hell and enduring the most pernicious kind of torture.

Beatrice Patsalides describes this transmogrification thus in "Ethics of the Unspeakable: Torture Survivors in Psychoanalytic Treatment":

"As the gap between the 'I' and the 'me' deepens, dissociation and alienation increase. The subject that, under torture, was forced into the position of pure object has lost his or her sense of interiority, intimacy, and privacy. Time is experienced now, in the present only, and perspective – that which allows for a sense of relativity – is foreclosed. Thoughts and dreams attack the mind and invade the body as if the protective skin that normally contains our

thoughts, gives us space to breathe in between the thought and the thing being thought about, and separates between inside and outside, past and present, me and you, was lost."

Torture robs the victim of the most basic modes of relating to reality and, thus, is the equivalent of cognitive death. Space and time are warped by sleep deprivation. The self ("I") is shattered. The tortured have nothing familiar to hold on to: family, home, personal belongings, loved ones, language, name. Gradually, they lose their mental resilience and sense of freedom. They feel alien – unable to communicate, relate, attach, or empathize with others.

Torture splinters early childhood grandiose narcissistic fantasies of uniqueness, omnipotence, invulnerability, and impenetrability. But it enhances the fantasy of merger with an idealized and omnipotent (though not benign) other – the inflicter of agony. The twin processes of individuation and separation are reversed.

Torture is the ultimate act of perverted intimacy. The torturer invades the victim's body, pervades his psyche, and possesses his mind. Deprived of contact with others and starved for human interactions, the prey bonds with the predator. "Traumatic bonding", akin to the Stockholm Syndrome, is about hope and the search for meaning in the brutal and indifferent and nightmarish universe of the torture cell.

The abuser becomes the black hole at the center of the victim's surrealistic galaxy, sucking in the sufferer's universal need for solace. The victim tries to "control" his tormentor by becoming one with him (introjecting him) and by appealing to the monster's presumably dormant humanity and empathy.

This bonding is especially strong when the torturer and the tortured form a dyad and "collaborate" in the rituals and acts of torture (for instance, when the victim is coerced into selecting the torture implements and the types of torment to be inflicted, or to choose between two evils).

The psychologist Shirley Spitz offers this powerful overview of the contradictory nature of torture in a seminar titled "The Psychology of Torture" (1989):

"Torture is an obscenity in that it joins what is most private with what is most public. Torture entails all the isolation and extreme solitude of privacy with none of the usual security embodied therein... Torture entails at the same time all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibilities for camaraderie or shared experience. (The presence of an all powerful other with whom to merge, without the security of the other's benign intentions.)

A further obscenity of torture is the inversion it makes of intimate human relationships. The interrogation is a form of social encounter in which the normal rules of communicating, of relating, of intimacy are manipulated. Dependency needs are elicited by the interrogator, but not so they may be met as in close relationships, but to weaken and confuse. Independence that is offered in return for 'betrayal' is a lie. Silence is intentionally misinterpreted either as confirmation of information or as guilt for 'complicity'.

Torture combines complete humiliating exposure with utter devastating isolation. The final products and outcome of torture are a scarred and often shattered victim and an empty display of the fiction of power."

Obsessed by endless ruminations, demented by pain and a continuum of sleeplessness – the victim regresses, shedding all but the most primitive defense mechanisms: splitting, narcissism, dissociation, Projective Identification, introjection, and cognitive dissonance. The victim constructs an alternative world, often suffering from depersonalization and derealization, hallucinations, ideas of reference, delusions, and psychotic episodes.

Sometimes the victim comes to crave pain – very much as self-mutilators do – because it is a proof and a reminder of his individuated existence otherwise blurred by the incessant torture. Pain shields the sufferer from disintegration and capitulation. It preserves the veracity of his unthinkable and unspeakable experiences.

This dual process of the victim's alienation and addiction to anguish complements the perpetrator's view of his quarry as "inhuman", or "subhuman". The torturer assumes the position of the sole authority, the exclusive fount of meaning and interpretation, the source of both evil and good.

Torture is about reprogramming the victim to succumb to an alternative exegesis of the world, proffered by the abuser. It is an act of deep, indelible, traumatic indoctrination. The abused also swallows whole and assimilates the torturer's negative view of him and often, as a result, is rendered suicidal, self-destructive, or self-defeating.

Thus, torture has no cut-off date. The sounds, the voices, the smells, the sensations reverberate long after the episode has ended – both in nightmares and in waking moments. The victim's ability to trust other people – i.e., to assume that their motives are at least rational, if not necessarily benign – has been irrevocably undermined. Social institutions are perceived as precariously poised on the verge of an ominous, Kafkaesque mutation. Nothing is either safe, or credible anymore.

Victims typically react by undulating between emotional numbing and increased arousal: insomnia, irritability, restlessness, and attention deficits. Recollections of the traumatic events intrude in the form of dreams, night terrors, flashbacks, and distressing associations.

The tortured develop compulsive rituals to fend off obsessive thoughts. Other psychological sequelae reported include cognitive impairment, reduced capacity to learn, memory disorders, sexual dysfunction, social withdrawal, inability to maintain long-term relationships, or even mere intimacy, phobias, ideas of reference and superstitions, delusions, hallucinations, psychotic microepisodes, and emotional flatness.

Depression and anxiety are very common. These are forms and manifestations of self-directed aggression. The sufferer rages at his own victimhood and resulting multiple dysfunction. He feels shamed by his new disabilities and responsible, or even guilty, somehow, for his predicament and the dire consequences borne by his nearest and dearest. His sense of self-worth and self-esteem are crippled.

In a nutshell, torture victims suffer from a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their strong feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame are also typical of victims of childhood abuse, domestic violence, and rape. They feel anxious because the perpetrator's behavior is seemingly arbitrary and unpredictable – or mechanically and inhumanly regular.

They feel guilty and disgraced because, to restore a semblance of order to their shattered world and a modicum of dominion over their chaotic life, they need to transform themselves into the cause of their own degradation and the accomplices of their tormentors.

The CIA, in its "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual – 1983" (reprinted in the April 1997 issue of Harper's Magazine), summed up the theory of coercion thus:

"The purpose of all coercive techniques is to induce psychological regression in the subject by bringing a superior outside force to bear on his will to resist. Regression is basically a loss of autonomy, a reversion to an earlier behavioral level. As the subject regresses, his learned personality traits fall away in reverse chronological order. He begins to lose the capacity to carry out the highest creative activities, to deal with complex situations, or to cope with stressful interpersonal relationships or repeated frustrations."

(continued below)

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Inevitably, in the aftermath of torture, its victims feel helpless and powerless. This loss of control over one's life and body is manifested physically in impotence, attention deficits, and insomnia. This is often exacerbated by the disbelief many torture victims encounter, especially if they are unable to produce scars, or other "objective" proof of their ordeal. Language cannot communicate such an intensely private experience as pain.

Spitz makes the following observation:

"Pain is also unsharable in that it is resistant to language... All our interior states of consciousness: emotional, perceptual, cognitive and somatic can be described as having an object in the external world... This affirms our capacity to move beyond the boundaries of our body into the external, sharable world. This is the space in which we interact and communicate with our environment. But when we explore the interior state of physical pain we find that there is no object 'out there' – no external, referential content. Pain is not of, or for, anything. Pain is. And it draws us away from the space of interaction, the sharable world, inwards. It draws us into the boundaries of our body."

Bystanders resent the tortured because they make them feel guilty and ashamed for having done nothing to prevent the atrocity. The victims threaten their sense of security and their much-needed belief in predictability, justice, and rule of law. The victims, on their part, do not believe that it is possible to effectively communicate to "outsiders" what they have been through. The torture chambers are "another galaxy". This is how Auschwitz was described by the author K. Zetnik in his testimony in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

Kenneth Pope in "Torture", a chapter he wrote for the "Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender", quotes Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman:

"It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering."

But, more often, continued attempts to repress fearful memories result in psychosomatic illnesses (conversion). The victim wishes to forget the torture, to avoid re-experiencing the often life threatening abuse and to shield his human environment from the horrors. In conjunction with the victim's pervasive distrust, this is frequently interpreted as hypervigilance, or even paranoia. It seems that the victims can't win. Torture is forever.

It would seem that while the victim progresses from denial to helplessness, rage, depression and thence to acceptance of the traumatizing events - society demonstrates a diametrically opposed progression. This incompatibility, this mismatch of psychological phases is what leads to the formation and crystallization of trauma.

PHASE I

Victim phase I - DENIAL

The magnitude of such unfortunate events is often so overwhelming, their nature so alien, and their message so menacing - that denial sets in as a defence mechanism aimed at self preservation. The victim denies that the event occurred, that he or she is being abused, that a loved one passed away.

Society phase I - ACCEPTANCE, MOVING ON

The victim's nearest ("Society") - his colleagues, his employees, his clients, even his spouse, children, and friends - rarely experience the events with the same shattering intensity. They are likely to accept the bad news and move on. Even at their most considerate and empathic, they are likely to lose patience with the victim's state of mind. They tend to ignore the victim, or chastise him, to mock, or to deride his feelings or behavior, to collude to repress the painful memories, or to trivialize them.

Summary Phase I

The mismatch between the victim's reactive patterns and emotional needs and society's matter-of-fact attitude hinders growth and healing. The victim requires society's help in avoiding a head-on confrontation with a reality he cannot digest. Instead, society serves as a

constant and mentally destabilizing reminder of the root of the victim's unbearable agony (the Job syndrome).

PHASE II

Victim phase II - HELPLESSNESS

Denial gradually gives way to a sense of all-pervasive and humiliating helplessness, often accompanied by debilitating fatigue and mental disintegration. These are among the classic symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). These are the bitter results of the internalization and integration of the harsh realization that there is nothing one can do to alter the outcomes of a natural, or man-made, catastrophe. The horror in confronting one's finiteness, meaninglessness, negligibility, and powerlessness - is overpowering.

Society phase II - DEPRESSION

The more the members of society come to grips with the magnitude of the loss, or evil, or threat represented by the grief inducing events - the sadder they become. Depression is often little more than suppressed or self-directed anger. The anger, in this case, is belatedly induced by an identified or diffuse source of threat, or of evil, or loss. It is a higher level variant of the "fight or flight" reaction, tampered by the rational understanding that the "source" is often too abstract to tackle directly.

Summary Phase II

Thus, when the victim is most in need, terrified by his helplessness and adrift - society is immersed in depression and unable to provide a holding and supporting environment. Growth and healing is again retarded by social interaction. The victim's innate sense of annulment is enhanced by the self-addressed anger (=depression) of those around him.

PHASE III

Both the victim and society react with RAGE to their predicaments. In an effort to narcissistically reassert himself, the victim develops a grandiose sense of anger directed at paranoidly selected, unreal, diffuse, and abstract targets (=frustration sources). By expressing aggression, the victim re-acquires mastery of the world and of himself.

Members of society use rage to re-direct the root cause of their depression (which is, as we said, self directed anger) and to channel it safely. To ensure that this expressed aggression alleviates their depression - real targets must be selected and real punishments meted out. In this respect, "social rage" differs from the victim's. The former is intended to sublimate aggression and channel it in a socially acceptable manner - the latter to reassert narcissistic self-love as an antidote to an all-devouring sense of helplessness.

In other words, society, by itself being in a state of rage, positively enforces the narcissistic rage reactions of the grieving victim. This, in the long run, is counter-productive, inhibits personal growth, and prevents healing. It also erodes the reality test of the victim and encourages self-delusions, paranoid ideation, and ideas of reference.

PHASE IV

Victim Phase IV - DEPRESSION

As the consequences of narcissistic rage - both social and personal - grow more unacceptable, depression sets in. The victim internalizes his aggressive impulses. Self directed rage is safer but is the cause of great sadness and even suicidal ideation. The victim's depression is a way of conforming to social norms. It is also instrumental in ridding the victim of the unhealthy residues of narcissistic regression. It is when the victim acknowledges the malignancy of his rage (and its anti-social nature) that he adopts a depressive stance.

Society Phase IV - HELPLESSNESS

People around the victim ("society") also emerge from their phase of rage transformed. As they realize the futility of their rage, they feel more and more helpless and devoid of options. They grasp their limitations and the irrelevance of their good intentions. They accept the inevitability of loss and evil and Kafkaesquely agree to live under an ominous cloud of arbitrary judgment, meted out by impersonal powers.

Summary Phase IV

Again, the members of society are unable to help the victim to emerge from a self-destructive phase. His depression is enhanced by their apparent helplessness. Their introversion and inefficacy induce in the victim a feeling of nightmarish isolation and alienation. Healing and growth are once again retarded or even inhibited.

PHASE V

Victim Phase V - ACCEPTANCE AND MOVING ON

Depression - if pathologically protracted and in conjunction with other mental health problems - sometimes leads to suicide. But more often, it allows the victim to process mentally hurtful and potentially harmful material and paves the way to acceptance. Depression is a laboratory of the psyche. Withdrawal from social pressures enables the direct transformation of anger into other emotions, some of them otherwise socially unacceptable. The honest encounter between the victim and his own (possible) death often becomes a cathartic and self-empowering inner dynamic. The victim emerges ready to move on.

Society Phase V - DENIAL

Society, on the other hand, having exhausted its reactive arsenal - resorts to denial. As memories fade and as the victim recovers and abandons his obsessive-compulsive dwelling on his pain - society feels morally justified to forget and forgive. This mood of historical revisionism, of moral leniency, of effusive forgiveness, of re-interpretation, and of a refusal to remember in detail - leads to a repression and denial of the painful events by society.

Summary Phase V

This final mismatch between the victim's emotional needs and society's reactions is less damaging to the victim. He is now more resilient, stronger, more flexible, and more willing to forgive and forget. Society's denial is really a denial of the victim. But, having ridden himself of more primitive narcissistic defenses - the victim can do without society's acceptance,

approval, or look. Having endured the purgatory of grieving, he has now re-acquired his self, independent of society's acknowledgement.

Stephen:

In light of recent events, the disaster in Asia from the Tsunami, I would like to address how a NPD would react to it. Most NPDs are attuned to how people react to events and a NPD will either try to divert attention to themselves, by changing the subject, or they will take over the discussion becoming experts on the disaster and show more feeling than other people. From my own experience in disasters, a NPD will be drawn to the attention that the disaster creates; the media and people who gather to it. Most people have a health mix of altruistic and narcissistic (selfish) emotions and motivations. When an altruistic person (dare I say a person suffering from altruistic personality disorder?) goes to help others, they do so as a good Samaritan without a thought to themselves or to gain. [Altruism](#). A NPD sees such situations as pure gain, as a place where they can shine and be the star. They may not do much, but whenever the TV cameras come out, the NPD will run towards them. They will follow Winston Churchill's example when he said, History will be kind to me because I will write it. The impulse of narcissism is always based on image building as well as control; you rarely can have one without the other.

A by-product of disasters is the outpouring of feeling for the victims that the NPD can turn towards them, by interposing themselves between the givers and the needy. Again we have the role of gate keeper that I have written about here. One would expect to see NPDs involved with charities as well as normal people. How can you tell? Just apply the DSM IV criteria to anyone you meet in a charity and see if they meet jive.

I will share my own experiences in working with refugees and volunteers in a disaster situation.

One volunteer was always there, willing to do anything, and always escaping when the press showed up. Other volunteers, who did great work, always were drawn to the lights of the TV cameras. [TV and narcissism](#) Finally some volunteers only showed up when the TV cameras were around and they disappeared when they left. One woman arrived, in great style, announcing that she would run the show and asked us to baby-sit her child c a week after the disaster had started and after seeing TV reports. Ah fame and glory are fleeting! Another volunteer was interviewed after the disaster and re-historied the event, painting himself as the sole hero. A NPD friend started wearing the same kind of cloths I was wearing during the disaster, passing himself off as a volunteer. So we have the workers, the near workers, the show offs, the liar workers and the pure liars that make up the range of NPD spectrum.

Sam:

How true!

In his drive for Narcissistic Supply, would the narcissist be callous enough to exploit the tragedy of others, if this were to secure him a new Supply Source?

A narcissist, for instance, will give a helping hand, console, guide, and encourage another person only if that person is important, powerful, has access to other important or powerful

people, or to the media, or has a following - in other words, only if the bereaved, one recovered, can provide the narcissist with benefits or narcissistic supply.

The same applies if helping, consoling, guiding, or encouraging that person is likely to win the narcissist applause, approval, adoration, a following, or some other kind of Narcissist Supply from on-lookers and witnesses to the interaction. The act of helping another person must be documented and thus transformed into narcissistic nourishment.

Otherwise the narcissist is not concerned or interested in the problems and suffering of others. The narcissist has no time or energy for anything, except for obtaining next narcissistic fix, ***NO MATTER WHAT THE PRICE AND WHO IS TRAMPLED UPON.***

Some narcissists are ostentatiously generous – they donate to charity, lavish gifts on their closest, abundantly provide for their nearest and dearest, and, in general, are open-handed and unstintingly benevolent. How can this be reconciled with the pronounced lack of empathy and with the pernicious self-preoccupation that is so typical of narcissists?

The act of giving enhances the narcissist's sense of omnipotence, his fantastic grandiosity, and the contempt he holds for others. It is easy to feel superior to the supplicating recipients of one's largesse. Narcissistic altruism is about exerting control and maintaining it by fostering dependence in the beneficiaries.

But narcissists give for other reasons as well.

The narcissist flaunts his charitable nature as a bait. He impresses others with his selflessness and kindness and thus lures them into his lair, entraps them, and manipulates and brainwashes them into subservient compliance and obsequious collaboration. People are attracted to the narcissist's larger than life posture – only to discover his true personality traits when it is far too late. "Give a little to take a lot" – is the narcissist's creed.

This does not prevent the narcissist from assuming the role of the exploited victim. Narcissists always complain that life and people are unfair to them and that they invest far more than their "share of the profit". The narcissist feels that he is the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat, and that his relationships are asymmetric and imbalanced. "She gets out of our marriage far more than I do" – is a common refrain. Or: "I do all the work around here – and they get all the perks and benefits!"

Faced with such (mis)perceived injustice – and once the relationship is clinched and the victim is "hooked" – the narcissist tries to minimize his contributions. He regards his input as a contractual maintenance chore and the unpleasant and inevitable price he has to pay for his Narcissistic Supply.

After many years of feeling deprived and wronged, some narcissists lapse into "sadistic generosity" or "sadistic altruism". They use their giving as a weapon to taunt and torment the needy and to humiliate them. In the distorted thinking of the narcissist, donating money gives him the right and license to hurt, chastise, criticize, and berate the recipient. His generosity, feels the narcissist, elevates him to a higher moral ground.

Most narcissists confine their giving to money and material goods. Their munificence is an abusive defense mechanism, intended to avoid real intimacy. Their "big-hearted" charity

renders all their relationships – even with their spouses and children – "business-like", structured, limited, minimal, non-emotional, unambiguous, and non-ambivalent. By doling out bounteously, the narcissist "knows where he stands" and does not feel threatened by demands for commitment, emotional investment, empathy, or intimacy.

In the narcissist's wasteland of a life, even his benevolence is spiteful, sadistic, punitive, and distancing.

Stephen:

Sam, I look forward to more dialogues during 2005. All the best to our readers, and hopefully they will escape their NPD situations, and the NPDs will modify their behavior (not!).

Sam:

Thank you, SM, for providing this forum and for your thought-provoking and fresh perspectives on this age-old problem!

Saturday, January 22, 2005, Eighth Letter to [Sam Vaknin](#) from [Stephen McDonnell](#)

NPD: the good, the bad and the ugly or is it an addiction?

Dear Sam,

Where would we be without narcissists? There would probably be no great works of art, or of science. Great empires would not exist. The ego and self esteem necessary for creating something new is found partially in the mirror of a narcissist's soul; they need to be admired and only by creating or destroying, can they attain that goal.

"Though there is plenty of narcissism without greatness, there is no greatness without narcissism." Albert Bernstein author of Emotional Vampires

Dr Bernstein points out in his books that narcissists are very competitive, they are driven to be admired and if they do not stay a 'legend in their own mind' (many NPDs believe their own publicity, but others actually can go beyond their own hype) they may well become a legend in their time by dint of hard work and intelligence. For better or worse we are stuck with them, so must learn to live with their foibles. They can be good citizens and contribute to society.

Sam:

I have often grappled with this question. Is pathological narcissism a blessing or a malediction?

The answer is: it depends. Healthy narcissism is a mature, balanced love of oneself coupled with a stable sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Healthy narcissism implies knowledge of one's boundaries and a proportionate and realistic appraisal of one's achievements and traits.

Pathological narcissism is wrongly described as too much healthy narcissism (or too much self-esteem). These are two absolutely unrelated phenomena which, regrettably, came to bear

the same title. Confusing pathological narcissism with self-esteem betrays a fundamental ignorance of both.

Pathological narcissism involves an impaired, dysfunctional, immature (True) Self coupled with a compensatory fiction (the False Self). The sick narcissist's sense of self-worth and self-esteem derive entirely from audience feedback. The narcissist has no self-esteem or self-worth of his own (no such ego functions). In the absence of observers, the narcissist shrivels to non-existence and feels dead. Hence the narcissist's preying habits in his constant pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. Pathological narcissism is an addictive behavior.

Still, dysfunctions are reactions to abnormal environments and situations (e.g., abuse, trauma, smothering, etc.).

Paradoxically, his dysfunction allows the narcissist to function. It compensates for lacks and deficiencies by exaggerating tendencies and traits. It is like the tactile sense of a blind person. In short: pathological narcissism is a result of over-sensitivity, the repression of overwhelming memories and experiences, and the suppression of inordinately strong negative feelings (e.g., hurt, envy, anger, or humiliation).

That the narcissist functions at all - is because of his pathology and thanks to it. The alternative is complete decompensation and integration.

In time, the narcissist learns how to leverage his pathology, how to use it to his advantage, how to deploy it in order to maximize benefits and utilities - in other words, how to transform his curse into a blessing.

Narcissists are obsessed by delusions of fantastic grandeur and superiority. As a result they are very competitive. They are strongly compelled - where others are merely motivated. They are driven, relentless, tireless, and ruthless. They often make it to the top. But even when they do not - they strive and fight and learn and climb and create and think and devise and design and conspire. Faced with a challenge - they are likely to do better than non-narcissists.

Yet, we often find that narcissists abandon their efforts in mid-stream, give up, vanish, lose interest, devalue former pursuits, fail, or slump. Why is that?

Narcissists are prone to self-defeating and self-destructive behaviors.

Can the narcissist be harnessed? Can his energies be channeled [productively](#)?

This would be a deeply flawed – and even dangerous – "advice". Various management gurus purport to teach us how to harness this force of nature known as malignant or [pathological narcissism](#). Narcissists are driven, visionary, ambitious, exciting and productive, says [Michael Maccoby](#), for instance. To ignore such a resource is a criminal waste. All we need to do is learn how to "handle" them.

Yet, this prescription is either naive or disingenuous. Narcissists cannot be "handled", or "managed", or "contained", or "channeled". They are, by definition, incapable of team work. They lack empathy, are exploitative, envious, haughty and feel entitled, even if such a feeling is commensurate only with their grandiose fantasies and when their accomplishments are meager.

Narcissists dissemble, conspire, destroy and self-destruct. Their drive is compulsive, their vision rarely grounded in reality, their human relations a calamity. In the long run, there is no enduring benefit to dancing with narcissists – only ephemeral and, often, fallacious, "achievements".

Stephen:

Your last letter was great. I wonder if anyone who is ignorant of the DSM IV, and the different diagnostic criteria in it, would understand what we are talking about? Only seven years ago, I would have thought what you and I have written as so much "hog wash." Having brought up to not believe in mental disorders, and even after I had attended medical school, it took a great mental leap and effort to open my mind to the labeling of people with mental disease. Having also been brought up by people who label others very easily, something NPDs do because they only see in black and white, I am reluctant to put someone in a box and say he or she is such and such a thing. My change in outlook happened when I saw that several people, male and female and from different age brackets and cultures, all were acting the same way. A light went on in my head, and a lot of preconceived ideas - and nightmares - disappeared.

Therefore I hope that a reader of these letters will indulge us, and hopefully will have attained enlightenment, before reading them. Or maybe he or she will suddenly see the light; there is an intellectual component to understanding, as well as an emotional one. The realization that Narcissistic Personality Disorder was real, that such people did exist and it wasn't me who was crazy but them, changed my life forever. Knowledge is power. It started me on a journey to understand more of how the mind works and how it can be derailed by mental and personality disorders. I can understand most of the concepts you write about, but there are always new surprises along the way.

Fortunately one of my first stops was your web site, Sam. When you started writing about Inverted Narcissism, it resonated with me. How often had I seen such behavior? More than I would like to admit. When I broached the subject of BDSM, in the last letter, I envisioned the same kind of relationship existed between a narcissist and a victim. You set me straight on that. Though I believe that the invisible bonds that form and the verbal abuse that occurs in a NPD victim dyad is just as binding as a slave master relationship.

Sam:

Don't misunderstand me: I found your idea of comparing narcissistic abuser-victim dyads to BDSM dyads thought-provoking and fascinating. I just am not sure that it holds true for the majority of victims. It is a fact, after all, that a vast number of the abused are unhappy (ego-dystonic) and do their best to extricate themselves from the abusive relationship. Having said that, the model you proposed in dialog 7 is, in my view, surprisingly useful in comprehending the dynamics of abusive relationships!

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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And thank you for your kind words regarding my work. A moment of self-congratulatory reminiscing (what else could you expect from a narcissist):

When I started writing "[Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited](#)" in 1996, I went online to search for "narcissism" and the "Narcissistic Personality Disorder". Google wasn't invented yet. Infoseek, the reigning search engine of the time, spewed out 150 Web sites containing the word narcissism. That was it. There was not a single mailing or discussion group dedicated to narcissism. Alt.narcissism, the Usenet group, was defunct.

Fast forward to 2005. Type the word "narcissism" into Google or Yahoo and you get 500,000 results. There are more than 50 discussion, study, and mailing groups dedicated to pathological narcissism, with well over 15,000 active members in total. Even the media is beginning to pay attention. It is gratifying.

Stephen:

Is there a chemical addiction involved? In a book I am reading by Dr. Susan Greenfield, *The Private Life of the Brain* in which she details the actions of drugs on the brain. As well, she talks of how we often seek strong physical and emotional situations that obliterate our consciousness - she says we are seeking to recreate our childhood mental state. I wonder if the NPD victim is seeking a parent child relationship? The feelings of joy and pain we felt when growing up are engrained in our minds.

Sam:

This is the orthodoxy, the prevailing view.

The narcissist is a person who is irreparably traumatized by the behavior of the most important people in his life: his parents, role models, or peers. By being capricious, arbitrary, and sadistically judgmental, they molded him into an adult, who fervently and obsessively tries to recreate the trauma in order to, this time around, resolve it (repetition complex).

Thus, on the one hand, the narcissist feels that his freedom depends upon re-enacting these early experiences. On the other hand, he is terrified by this prospect. Realizing that he is doomed to go through the same traumas over and over again, the narcissist distances himself by using his aggression to alienate, to humiliate and in general, to be emotionally absent.

This behavior brings about the very consequence that the narcissist so fears - abandonment. But, this way, at least, the narcissist is able to tell himself (and others) that **HE** was the one who fostered the separation, that it was fully his choice and that he was not surprised. The truth is that, governed by his internal demons, the narcissist has no real choice. The dismal future of his relationships is preordained.

I know very little about brain chemistry, but I want to offer these observations:

The narcissist's moods change abruptly in the wake of a [narcissistic injury](#). One can easily manipulate the moods of a narcissist by making a disparaging remark, by disagreeing with him, by [criticising](#) him, by doubting his [grandiosity](#) or fantastic claims, etc.

Such **REACTIVE** mood shifts are not provoked by the fluctuations in the narcissist's body chemistry (for instance, his blood sugar levels), or with the presence or absence of any substance or chemical in his brain. It is possible to reduce the narcissist to a state of rage and depression **AT ANY MOMENT**, simply by employing the above "technique". He can be elated, even manic – and in a split second, following a narcissistic injury, depressed, sulking or raging.

The opposite is also true. The narcissist can be catapulted from the bleakest despair to utter mania (or at least to an increased and marked feeling of well-being) by being provided with the flimsiest [Narcissistic Supply](#) (attention, adulation, etc.).

These swings are totally correlated to external events (narcissistic injury or Narcissistic Supply) and not to cycles of hormones, enzymes, neurotransmitters, sugar, or other substances in the body.

It is conceivable, though, that a third, unrelated problem causes chemical imbalances in the brain, metabolic diseases such as diabetes, pathological narcissism, and other mental health syndromes. There may be a common cause, a hidden common denominator (perhaps a group of genes).

Other disorders, like the [Bipolar Disorder](#) (mania-depression) are characterised by mood swings that are not brought about by external events (endogenous, not exogenous). But the narcissist's mood swings are strictly the results of external events (as he perceives and interprets them, of course).

Narcissists are absolutely insulated from their [emotions](#). They are emotionally flat or numb.

The narcissist does not have pendular (cyclical) mood swings on a regular, almost predictable basis, from [depression](#) to euphoria (mania), as is the case in biochemically induced mental disorders.

Additionally, the narcissist goes through [mega-cycles](#) which last months or even years. These cannot, of course, be attributed to blood sugar levels or to Dopamine and Serotonin secretions in the brain.

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) per se is not treated with medication. The underlying [disorder is treated](#) by one of the long-term psychodynamic or cognitive-

behavioural therapies. Other Personality Disorders (NPD is usually [comorbid](#) - diagnosed with other PDs) are treated separately and according to their own characteristics.

But phenomena, which are often associated with NPD, such as depression or OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), are treated with medication. Rumour has it that SSRI's (such as Fluoxetine, known as Prozac) might have adverse effects if the primary disorder is NPD. They sometimes lead to the Serotonin syndrome, which includes agitation and exacerbates the [rage attacks](#) typical of a narcissist. The use of SSRI's is associated at times with delirium and the emergence of a manic phase and even with psychotic microepisodes.

This is not the case with the heterocyclics, MAO and mood stabilisers, such as lithium. Blockers and inhibitors are regularly applied without discernible adverse side effects (as far as NPD is concerned).

Additionally, cognitive-behavioural therapies are often used to treat the attendant OCD and depression.

To summarise:

Not enough is known about the biochemistry of NPD. There seems to be some vague link to Serotonin but no one knows for sure. There isn't a reliable non-intrusive method to measure brain and central nervous system Serotonin levels anyhow, so it is mostly guesswork at this stage.

Thus, as of now, the typical and recommended treatment for pathological narcissism and the comorbid depression and OCD is talk therapy of one kind (psychodynamic) or another (cognitive-behavioural).

Antidepressants can be used moderately (with SSRI being currently under critical scrutiny).

Stephen:

One of the elements we left out in my discussion of the dyads is what happens in the brain during and afterward - I am not discounting what you wrote and agree with you. But why do people becoming addicted to such behavior - is there a chemical component? Both the NPD and the victims show signs of addiction to each other; as you pointed out in your letters this is a sign of codependency, Stockholm syndrome etc. I posit that just as there is a "runners high" caused by brain chemicals (neurotransmitters), in both a BDSM and an NPD/victim relationship the victim becomes addicted to the high of the pain and abuse. The brain has neurons with have receptors for chemicals that either are produced internally or come from the exterior - that is why morphine and other drugs work so well, they fit into pre-existing sites in the brain.

Watching the interaction of NPDs and victims, I would surmise that they are addicted to each other; both are giving each other some kind of supply of chemicals. Take the case of cigarette smokers; there is both a social and a chemical component to nicotine addiction. We can suppose there is a predisposition to smoking in all of us, yet many of us never develop an addiction to cigarettes. Is the same true for addiction to the pain of a NPD relationship? The parties involved, no matter how much they protest to the contrary, are enmeshed to the point where the victim as to detoxify after leaving a NPD. On the other hand, I have recently read a

newspaper article, unfortunately without any reference, that alleged people with NPD and Borderline personality disorders often become stalkers - they cannot accept that their object of desire either is not interested in them or would reject them.

Sam:

I suggested long ago that the narcissist is the mental equivalent of the alcoholic. He is insatiable. He directs his whole behaviour, in fact his life, to obtain the pleasurable titbits of attention called "[Narcissistic Supply](#)". He embeds them in a coherent, completely biased, picture of himself. He uses them to regulate his labile sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

In other words, we both think that the narcissist is an addict. But I postulate that he is addicted to narcissistic supply - and not to the *SOURCES* of narcissistic supply, as you propose. The sources (his victims) are interchangeable. His dependence on narcissistic supply is invariable.

Are the victims addicted to "their" narcissistic abusers?

Some are undoubtedly (the ones who are Inverted Narcissists and the straightforward codependents). But I still maintain that the majority are not.

Regardless of whether the victim is addicted to her abuser or not, it is an intriguing idea to apply therapeutic modalities borrowed from the treatment of addictive behaviours to the treatment of victims of abuse.

Stephen:

The NPD relationship is about power, the power to charm, to control and eventually to receive 'narcissistic supply' in all of its various forms. The supply can begin with just compliments, to admiration, to 'love', to subjugation and finally complete control; the victim becomes a puppet mimicking and providing what the master or mistress wants. In mild forms, most people enjoy the charm of NPDs and do not mind paying them attention; only later is there a flip flop of interaction, whereby the NPD demands an in-ordinate quantity of attention for the little he or she gives you. (I am not sure how many times I have heard a NPD say to the victim that they belong to the NPD - all the benefits they receive are due to the NPD's generosity.)

Even with all I have read all about NPDs, I still do not understand them.

Intellectually, I can see what type of behavior is indicative of narcissism taken to a higher level, but I still wonder why? They are monsters who think differently than normal people even while they mimic normal behavior. What I do know is that we - as adults - must learn about them in order to avoid them, or at least cope with their destructive behavior. We cross paths with NPDs daily, we work and live with them and we suffer from what they do. Most of all, children suffer from NPDs, because they do not have the maturity or intelligence to understand what is going on. A NPD mother or father is like an emotional cancer, what they do as parents is infect their children. Only later will the seeds of their sickness blossom. Not always, but often an adult child will wonder why they do certain things, why they react in certain ways, and wonder what went wrong? Why are they Floccinaucinihilipilification?

<http://dictionary.reference.com/help/faq/language/f/floccinauci.html>

Emotionally abused children of NPD

I was just thinking about how I have always been obsessed with the truth. Not knowing if all victims of narcissists share this characteristic, I do know some who do, it struck me that if a child grows up surrounded by liars who live in a fantasy world (the narcissist who creates a world based on three things; me, myself and I) then it would follow that a child would either imitate the narcissist or would reject the lies, and try to discover the 'truth'. The first instance of this world that I found in reading about narcissists was in Alice Miller's Book, "The Drama of the Gifted Child, The Search for the True Self" in which she describes the house one of her clients lived in as a child. Her patient said that it was a glass house (he could have said one made of mirrors) and that all the bad things were hidden; this is the world a narcissist creates for themselves and their families. Ever noticed that some people's houses are perfect? The houses don't look lived in? Their children are perfect, or if they are too loud or difficult the parents put their children on drugs to make them perfect? I wonder if these kinds of people are NPD, if not Compulsive Obsessive? What is it like to live with such people? Perfectionists who nit pick everything and everyone, who are never happy, who fall apart whenever something goes wrong are difficult to live with.

What if a child sees the world one way then is told by parents that it is not real because the world is filtered through the adult NPD's anxieties and warped vision. Can this cause anxiety in the child? A child has to interpret what is real and what is fake; see Piaget for the stages of development of a child's brain/consciousness. The NPD's worldview is hell for children but it may provoke anxiety in other adults. Are we not all are raised to be fooled - it this what makes us adult - in order to survive? The transition to adulthood requires that we go along with the lies; learn how to tell white lies and to see a white lie. Children are cruel in that they will say what is on their minds, without a 'filter', what they see is the good bad or ugly truth. Only later do they realize the tooth fairy did not bring them a gift for their tooth (I know of a banker who used to give his child a hundred dollar bill and made sure everyone knew it) and the child becomes a skeptic and cynic. When a child learns how to lie, they enter the adult world, I believe.

Narcissists continue to believe in fantasies - especially about them selves. They are fun to be around for this very reason - they are the tooth fairies that fulfill our dreams. A narcissist warps reality; making lies into truths and vice versa.

If you live in such an atmosphere, it seems that nothing is real, all emotions are studied and acted, and all make believe. A child depending on an adult for emotional and moral comfort finds that the NPD parent is not there; either the parent is acting, or absent. Firstly the parent acts as if they are the greatest parent in the world, with ostentatious signs of love and caring; only the best schools, the best clothes, the best of everything. They will shower their child with 'material' love in a show for the watching audience. For a NPD, their child is an extension of the NPD adult, like their car or house, and so much reflect back their glory. Go to a soccer game and watch the parents who want their kids to win, no matter what, even if they end up hating the game. Is this because the parents 'care' for their children? Or is it because they see the child winning for the greater glory of the parent? Love that is conditional, that comes with instructions and all kinds of rules is a NPD love.

(continued below)

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The other side of NPD parenting is the total rejection of the child. The child is loved, from a distance, but never held, nor listened to. The child is a thing; hopefully it will grow up to be civilized. The NPD parent who is absent has no idea what to do has no inner voice to guide them. So the child believes they are unlovable. This is probably as bad as being 'loved to death' by the exhibitionist NPD parent. Do NPD parents spend time with their child? As Kat Stevens sang, in the song Cats and the cradle:

My son turned ten just the other day
He said, "Thanks for the ball dad, come on let's play
Can you teach me to throw?"

I said, "Not today, I've got a lot to do"

The child who is raised by NPDs is at a loss to understand the parent's actions. The NPD parent is probably as clueless. And so our society continues to encourage such behavior, keeping up with the Jones etc. The treadmill of conformity leads to the therapist's office.

Sam:

My mother suffered from a severe case of pathological narcissism (as well as other Axis II and Axis I disorders). I described my experiences as a child in this [segment](#) (titled "Abuse"), in my [poetry](#), in my [short fiction](#), and in my [journal](#). Despite years of writing, helping others, and interacting with both narcissists and victims (not to mention two bouts of failed therapy) - I failed to exorcise my childhood demons.

I wrote a very extensive essay about the way the narcissist is molded by his faulty upbringing. You can find it here:

http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type/doc/id/419

There is very little to add to the concise and accurate way you described the pernicious effects of growing up in a household of narcissists.

A few more insights and observations, though:

As you poignantly pointed out, the atmosphere in the narcissist's family unit is outlandish and sinister.

The narcissist's very self is a piece of fiction concocted to fend off hurt and to nurture the narcissist's grandiosity. He fails in his "reality test" - the ability to distinguish the actual from the imagined. The narcissist fervently believes in his own infallibility, brilliance, omnipotence, heroism, and perfection. He doesn't dare confront the truth and admit it even to himself.

Moreover, he imposes his personal mythology on his nearest and dearest. Spouse, children, colleagues, friends, neighbors - sometimes even perfect strangers - must abide by the narcissist's narrative or face his wrath. The narcissist countenances no disagreement, alternative points of view, or criticism. To him, confabulation *IS* reality.

The coherence of the narcissist's dysfunctional and precariously-balanced personality depends on the plausibility of his stories and on their acceptance by his Sources of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist invests an inordinate time in substantiating his tales, collecting "evidence", defending his version of events, and in re-interpreting reality to fit his scenario. As a result, most narcissists are self-delusional, obstinate, opinionated, and argumentative.

The narcissist's lies are not goal-orientated. This is what makes his constant dishonesty both disconcerting and incomprehensible. The narcissist lies at the drop of a hat, needlessly, and almost ceaselessly. He lies in order to avoid the Grandiosity Gap - when the abyss between fact and (narcissistic) fiction becomes too gaping to ignore.

The narcissist lies in order to preserve appearances, uphold fantasies, support the tall (and impossible) tales of his False Self and extract Narcissistic Supply from unsuspecting sources, who are not yet on to him. To the narcissist, confabulation is not merely a way of life - but life itself.

We are all conditioned to let other indulge in pet delusions and get away with white, not too egregious, lies. The narcissist makes use of our socialization. We dare not confront or expose him, despite the outlandishness of his claims, the improbability of his stories, the implausibility of his alleged accomplishments and conquests. We simply turn the other cheek, or meekly avert our eyes, often embarrassed.

Moreover, the narcissist makes clear, from the very beginning, that it is his way or the highway. His aggression - even violent streak - are close to the surface. He may be charming in a first encounter - but even then there are [telltale signs](#) of pent-up abuse. His interlocutors sense this impending threat and avoid conflict by acquiescing with the narcissist's fairy tales. Thus he imposes his private universe and virtual reality on his milieu - sometimes with disastrous consequences.

The narcissist is the guru at the center of a cult. Like other gurus, he demands complete obedience from his flock: his spouse, his offspring, other family members, friends, and colleagues. He feels entitled to adulation and special treatment by his followers. He punishes the wayward and the straying lambs. He enforces discipline, adherence to his teachings, and common goals. The less accomplished he is in reality - the more stringent his mastery and the more pervasive the brainwashing.

The – often involuntary – members of the narcissist's mini-cult inhabit a twilight zone of his own construction. He imposes on them a shared psychosis, replete with persecutory delusions, "enemies", mythical narratives, and apocalyptic scenarios if he is flouted.

The narcissist's control is based on ambiguity, unpredictability, fuzziness, and [ambient abuse](#). His ever-shifting whims exclusively define right versus wrong, desirable and unwanted, what is to be pursued and what to be avoided. He alone determines the rights and obligations of his disciples and alters them at will.

The narcissist is a micro-manager. He exerts control over the minutest details and behaviors. He punishes severely and abuses withholders of information and those who fail to conform to his wishes and goals.

The narcissist does not respect the boundaries and privacy of his reluctant adherents. He ignores their wishes and treats them as objects or instruments of gratification. He seeks to control both situations and people compulsively.

He strongly disapproves of others' personal autonomy and independence. Even innocuous activities, such as meeting a friend or visiting one's family require his permission. Gradually, he isolates his nearest and dearest until they are fully dependent on him emotionally, sexually, financially, and socially.

He acts in a patronizing and condescending manner and criticizes often. He alternates between emphasizing the minutest faults (devalues) and exaggerating the talents, traits, and skills (idealizes) of the members of his cult. He is wildly unrealistic in his expectations – which legitimizes his subsequent abusive conduct.

The narcissist claims to be infallible, superior, talented, skillful, omnipotent, and omniscient. He often lies and confabulates to support these unfounded claims. Within his cult, he expects awe, admiration, adulation, and constant attention commensurate with his outlandish stories and assertions. He reinterprets reality to fit his fantasies.

His thinking is dogmatic, rigid, and doctrinaire. He does not countenance free thought, pluralism, or free speech and doesn't brook criticism and disagreement. He demands – and often gets – complete trust and the relegation to his capable hands of all decision-making.

He forces the participants in his cult to be hostile to critics, the authorities, institutions, his personal enemies, or the media – if they try to uncover his actions and reveal the truth. He closely monitors and censors information from the outside, exposing his captive audience only to selective data and analyses.

The narcissist's cult is "missionary" and "imperialistic". He is always on the lookout for new recruits – his spouse's friends, his daughter's girlfriends, his neighbors, new colleagues at work. He immediately attempts to "convert" them to his "creed" – to convince them how wonderful and admirable he is. In other words, he tries to render them Sources of Narcissistic Supply.

Often, his behavior on these "recruiting missions" is different to his conduct within the "cult". In the first phases of wooing new admirers and proselytizing to potential "conscripts" – the narcissist is attentive, compassionate, empathic, flexible, self-effacing, and helpful. At home,

among the "veterans" he is tyrannical, demanding, willful, opinionated, aggressive, and exploitative.

As the leader of his congregation, the narcissist feels entitled to special amenities and benefits not accorded the "rank and file". He expects to be waited on hand and foot, to make free use of everyone's money and dispose of their assets liberally, and to be cynically exempt from the rules that he himself established (if such violation is pleasurable or gainful).

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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In extreme cases, the narcissist feels above the law – any kind of law. This grandiose and haughty conviction leads to criminal acts, incestuous or polygamous relationships, and recurrent friction with the authorities.

Hence the narcissist's panicky and sometimes violent reactions to "dropouts" from his cult. There's a lot going on that the narcissist wants kept under wraps. Moreover, the narcissist stabilizes his fluctuating sense of self-worth by deriving Narcissistic Supply from his victims. Abandonment threatens the narcissist's precariously balanced personality.

Add to that the narcissist's [paranoid and schizoid tendencies](#), his lack of [introspective self-awareness](#), and his [stunted sense of humor](#) (lack of self-deprecation) and the risks to the grudging members of his cult are clear.

The narcissist sees enemies and conspiracies everywhere. He often casts himself as the heroic victim (martyr) of dark and stupendous forces. In every deviation from his tenets he spies malevolent and ominous subversion. He, therefore, is bent on disempowering his devotees. By any and all means.

The narcissist does not require – nor does he seek – his parents' or his siblings' love, or to be loved by his children. He casts them as the audience in the theatre of his inflated grandiosity. He wishes to impress them, shock them, threaten them, infuse them with awe, inspire them, attract their attention, subjugate them, or manipulate them.

He emulates and simulates an entire range of emotions and employs every means to achieve these effects. He lies (narcissists are pathological liars – their very self is a false one). He acts the pitiful, or, its opposite, the resilient and reliable. He stuns and shines with outstanding intellectual, or physical capacities and achievements, or behavior patterns appreciated by the members of the family. When confronted with (younger) siblings or with his own children, the narcissist is likely to go through three phases:

At first, he perceives his offspring or siblings as a threat to his Narcissistic Supply, such as the attention of his spouse, or mother, as the case may be. They intrude on his turf and invade the Pathological Narcissistic Space. The narcissist does his best to belittle them, hurt (even physically) and humiliate them and then, when these reactions prove ineffective or counter productive, he retreats into an imaginary world of omnipotence. A period of emotional absence and detachment ensues.

His aggression having failed to elicit Narcissistic Supply, the narcissist proceeds to indulge himself in daydreaming, delusions of grandeur, planning of future coups, nostalgia and hurt (the Lost Paradise Syndrome). The narcissist reacts this way to the birth of his children or to the introduction of new foci of attention to the family cell (even to a new pet!).

Whomever the narcissist perceives to be in competition for scarce Narcissistic Supply is relegated to the role of the enemy. Where the uninhibited expression of the aggression and hostility aroused by this predicament is illegitimate or impossible – the narcissist prefers to stay away. Rather than attack his offspring or siblings, he sometimes immediately disconnects, detaches himself emotionally, becomes cold and uninterested, or directs transformed anger at his mate or at his parents (the more "legitimate" targets).

Other narcissists see the opportunity in the "mishap". They seek to manipulate their parents (or their mate) by "taking over" the newcomer. Such narcissists monopolise their siblings or their newborn children. This way, indirectly, they benefit from the attention directed at the infants. The sibling or offspring become vicarious sources of Narcissistic Supply and proxies for the narcissist.

An example: by being closely identified with his offspring, a narcissistic father secures the grateful admiration of the mother ("What an outstanding father/brother he is"). He also assumes part of or all the credit for baby's/sibling's achievements. This is a process of annexation and assimilation of the other, a strategy that the narcissist makes use of in most of his relationships.

As siblings or progeny grow older, the narcissist begins to see their potential to be edifying, reliable and satisfactory Sources of Narcissistic Supply. His attitude, then, is completely transformed. The former threats have now become promising potentials. He cultivates those whom he trusts to be the most rewarding. He encourages them to idolise him, to adore him, to be awed by him, to admire his deeds and capabilities, to learn to blindly trust and obey him, in short to surrender to his charisma and to become submerged in his follies-de-grandeur.

It is at this stage that the risk of child abuse - up to and including outright incest - is heightened. The narcissist is auto-erotic. He is the preferred object of his own sexual attraction. His siblings and his children share his genetic material. Molesting or having intercourse with them is as close as the narcissist gets to having sex with himself.

Moreover, the narcissist perceives sex in terms of annexation. The partner is "assimilated" and becomes an extension of the narcissist, a fully controlled and manipulated object. Sex, to the narcissist, is the ultimate act of depersonalization and objectification of the other. He actually masturbates with other people's bodies.

Minors pose little danger of criticizing the narcissist or confronting him. They are perfect, malleable and abundant sources of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist derives gratification from having coital relations with adulating, physically and mentally inferior, inexperienced and dependent "bodies".

These roles – allocated to them explicitly and demandingly or implicitly and perniciously by the narcissist – are best fulfilled by ones whose mind is not yet fully formed and independent. The older the siblings or offspring, the more they become critical, even judgemental, of the narcissist. They are better able to put into context and perspective his actions, to question his motives, to anticipate his moves.

As they mature, they often refuse to continue to play the mindless pawns in his chess game. They hold grudges against him for what he has done to them in the past, when they were less capable of resistance. They can gauge his true stature, talents and achievements – which, usually, lag far behind the claims that he makes.

This brings the narcissist a full cycle back to the first phase. Again, he perceives his siblings or sons/daughters as threats. He quickly becomes disillusioned and devaluing. He loses all interest, becomes emotionally remote, absent and cold, rejects any effort to communicate with him, citing life pressures and the preciousness and scarceness of his time.

He feels burdened, cornered, besieged, suffocated, and claustrophobic. He wants to get away, to abandon his commitments to people who have become totally useless (or even damaging) to him. He does not understand why he has to support them, or to suffer their company and he believes himself to have been deliberately and ruthlessly trapped.

He rebels either passively-aggressively (by refusing to act or by intentionally sabotaging the relationships) or actively (by being overly critical, aggressive, unpleasant, verbally and psychologically abusive and so on). Slowly – to justify his acts to himself – he gets immersed in conspiracy theories with clear paranoid hues.

To his mind, the members of the family conspire against him, seek to belittle or humiliate or subordinate him, do not understand him, or stymie his growth. The narcissist usually finally gets what he wants and the family that he has created disintegrates to his great sorrow (due to the loss of the Narcissistic Space) – but also to his great relief and surprise (how could they have let go someone as unique as he?).

This is the cycle: the narcissist feels threatened by arrival of new family members – he tries to assimilate or annex of siblings or offspring – he obtains Narcissistic Supply from them – he overvalues and idealizes these newfound sources – as sources grow older and independent, they adopt anti narcissistic behaviours – the narcissist devalues them – the narcissist feels stifled and trapped – the narcissist becomes paranoid – the narcissist rebels and the family disintegrates.

This cycle characterises not only the family life of the narcissist. It is to be found in other realms of his life (his career, for instance). At work, the narcissist, initially, feels threatened (no one knows him, he is a nobody). Then, he develops a circle of admirers, cronies and friends which he "nurtures and cultivates" in order to obtain Narcissistic Supply from them. He overvalues them (to him, they are the brightest, the most loyal, with the biggest chances to climb the corporate ladder and other superlatives).

But following some anti-narcissistic behaviours on their part (a critical remark, a disagreement, a refusal, however polite) – the narcissist devalues all these previously idealized individuals. Now that they have dared oppose him - they are judged by him to be stupid, cowardly, lacking in ambition, skills and talents, common (the worst expletive in the narcissist's vocabulary), with an unspectacular career ahead of them.

The narcissist feels that he is misallocating his scarce and invaluable resources (for instance, his time). He feels besieged and suffocated. He rebels and erupts in a series of self-defeating and self-destructive behaviours, which lead to the disintegration of his life.

Doomed to build and ruin, attach and detach, appreciate and depreciate, the narcissist is predictable in his "death wish". What sets him apart from other suicidal types is that his wish is granted to him in small, tormenting doses throughout his anguished life.

This is a very destructive pattern because parents (Primary Objects) and, more specifically, mothers are the first agents of socialisation. It is through his mother that the child explores the answers to the most important existential questions, which shape his entire life. How loved one is, how loveable, how independent one becomes, how guilty one should feel for wanting to become autonomous, how predictable is the world, how much abuse should one expect in life and so on.

To the infant, the mother, is not only an object of dependence (as his survival is at stake), love and adoration. It is a representation of the "universe" itself. It is through her that the child first exercises his senses: the tactile, the olfactory, and the visual.

Later on, she becomes the subject of his nascent sexual cravings (if a male) – a diffuse sense of wanting to merge, physically, as well as spiritually. This object of love is idealised and internalised and becomes part of his conscience (Superego). For better or for worse, she is the yardstick, the benchmark against which everything in his future is measured. One forever compares oneself, one's identity, one's actions and omissions, one's achievements, one's fears and hopes and aspirations to this mythical figure.

Growing up entails the gradual separation from one's mother. At first, the child begins to shape a more realistic view of her and incorporates the mother's shortcomings and disadvantages in this modified version. The more ideal, less realistic and earlier picture of the mother is stored and becomes part of the child's psyche. The later, less cheerful, more realistic view enables the infant to define his own identity and gender identity and to "go out to the world".

Thus, partly "abandoning" mother is the key to an independent exploration of the world, to personal autonomy and to a strong sense of self. Resolving the sexual complex and the resulting conflict of being attracted to a forbidden figure – is the second, determining, step.

The (male) child must realise that his mother is "off-limits" to him sexually (and emotionally, or psychosexually) and that she "belongs" to his father (or to other males). He must thereafter choose to imitate his father ("become a man") in order to win, in the future, someone like his mother.

The third (and final) stage of letting go of the mother is reached during the delicate period of adolescence. One then seriously ventures out and, finally, builds and secures one's own world, replete with a new "mother-lover". If any of these phases is thwarted – the process of differentiation is not be successfully completed, no autonomy or coherent self are achieved and dependence and "infantilism" characterise the unlucky person.

What determines the success or failure of these phases in one's personal history? Mostly, one's mother. If the mother does not "let go" – the child does not go. If the mother herself is the dependent, narcissistic type – the growth prospects of the child are, indeed, dim.

There are numerous mechanisms, which mothers use to ensure the continued presence and emotional dependence of their offspring (of both sexes).

The mother can cast herself in the role of the eternal victim, a sacrificial figure, who dedicated her life to the child (with the implicit or explicit proviso of reciprocity: that the child dedicate his life to her). Another strategy is to treat the child as an extension of the mother or, conversely, to treat herself as an extension of the child.

Yet another tactic is to create a situation of shared psychosis or "folie a deux" (the mother and child united against external threats), or an atmosphere suffused with sexual and erotic insinuations, leading to an illicit psychosexual bonding between mother and child.

In this, latter case, the adult's ability to interact with members of the opposite sex is gravely impaired and the mother is perceived as envious of any feminine influence other than hers. Such a mother is frequently critical of the women in her offspring's life pretending to do so in order to protect him from dangerous liaisons or from ones which are "beneath him" ("You deserve more").

Other mothers exaggerate their neediness: they emphasise their financial dependence and lack of resources, their health problems, their emotional barrenness without the soothing presence of the child, their need to be protected against this or that (mostly imaginary) enemy. Guilt is a prime mover in the perverted relationships of such mothers and their children.

The death of the mother is, therefore, both a devastating shock and a deliverance - ambivalent emotional reactions. Even a "normal" adult who mourns his dead mother is usually exposed to such emotional duality. This ambivalence is the source of great guilt feelings.

With a person who is abnormally attached to his mother, the situation is more complicated. He feels that he has a part in her death, that he is to blame, somehow responsible, that he could have done more. He is glad to be liberated and feels guilty and punishable because of it. He feels sad and elated, naked and powerful, exposed to dangers and omnipotent, about to disintegrate and to be newly integrated. These, precisely, are the emotional reactions to a successful therapy. With the death of his mother, the victim (often a narcissist himself) embarks on a process of healing.

Thank you, Stephen, for airing these important issues. Looking forward to our next exchange!

February 1, 2005, Ninth Letter to [Sam Vaknin](#) from [Stephen McDonnell](#)

Dear Sam,

I am sorry but this letter is going to cover a disparate number of subjects. It may not be as coherent as my previous letters as I am covering a lot of territory. Please bare with me, or is that bear with me? Freudian slip?

Sam:

(Laughing)

I love intermezzos. Go ahead ...

Stephen:

"Red Carpet NPDs" subspecies

In the Past week I have observed the actions of several people I think suffer from NPD. My conclusion - that they were NPD- did not come quickly. It is easy to jump to conclusions when people first hear about narcissists and see them everywhere. No, my decision to label these two came only after years of observing them. After all, many normal people act like narcissists and vice versa.

They could be male and female twins because they act the same way and I often cross their paths at official functions. These two are the "red carpet" variety of NPDs. One always tells me that he was going to show up with the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's son. He gravitates to the important people like the sycophant he is. On a smaller scale, he could be the proverbial moocher who hangs around receptions, with his pockets stuffed with celery and dip. The second person is someone who always sits at the head table when there is an important speaker, runs up to the microphone to make introductions, and is in general a blow fly buzzing around with a sanctimonious air. She poses, like all narcissists, as if she is the queen of the ball and she gathers a coterie of people who either are impressed with her or who think she will make them look better. The two people should be married to each other.

Sam:

Yeah, I know the type (sigh). If you can't be them - be around them. It sometimes is eerie. Some narcissists imitate their heroes - their mannerisms, mode of speech, vocabulary, even hairdo. It's like the narcissist is an empty shell, a receptacle which assumes the shape and traits of the narcissist's idol. These narcissists are like the moon - their glow is reflected.

But I must say that most narcissists would rather be famous themselves. To become a celebrity is, by far, their predominant drive. Being famous encompasses a few important functions: it endows the narcissist with power, provides him with a constant Source of Narcissistic Supply (admiration, adoration, approval, awe), and fulfils important Ego functions.

The image that the narcissist projects is hurled back at him, reflected by those exposed to his celebrity or fame. This way he feels alive, his very existence is affirmed and he acquires a sensation of clear boundaries (where the narcissist ends and the world begins).

There is a set of narcissistic behaviours typical to the pursuit of celebrity. There is almost nothing that the narcissist refrains from doing, almost no borders that he hesitates to cross to achieve renown. To him, there is no such thing as "bad publicity" – what matters is to be in the public eye.

Because the narcissist equally enjoys all types of attention and likes as much to be feared as to be loved, for instance – he doesn't mind if what is published about him is wrong ("as long as they spell my name correctly"). The narcissist's only bad emotional stretches are during periods of lack of attention, publicity, or exposure.

The narcissist then feels empty, hollowed out, negligible, humiliated, wrathful, discriminated against, deprived, neglected, treated unjustly and so on. At first, he tries to obtain attention from ever narrowing groups of reference ("supply scale down"). But the feeling that he is compromising gnaws at his anyhow fragile self-esteem.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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Sooner or later, the spring bursts. The narcissist plots, contrives, plans, conspires, thinks, analyses, synthesises and does whatever else is necessary to regain the lost exposure in the public eye. The more he fails to secure the attention of the target group (always the largest) – the more daring, eccentric and outlandish he becomes. Firm decision to become known is transformed into resolute action and then to a panicky pattern of attention seeking behaviours.

The narcissist is not really interested in publicity per se. Narcissists are misleading. The narcissist appears to love himself – and, really, he abhors himself. Similarly, he appears to be interested in becoming a celebrity – and, in reality, he is concerned with the **REACTIONS** to his fame: people watch him, notice him, talk about him, debate his actions – therefore he exists.

The narcissist goes around "hunting and collecting" the way the expressions on people's faces change when they notice him. He places himself at the centre of attention, or even as a figure of controversy. He constantly and recurrently pesters those nearest and dearest to him in a bid to reassure himself that he is not losing his fame, his magic touch, the attention of his social milieu.

Truly, the narcissist is not choosy. If he can become famous as a writer – he writes, if as a businessman – he conducts business. He switches from one field to the other with ease and without remorse because in all of them he is present without conviction, bar the conviction that he must (and deserves to) get famous.

He grades activities, hobbies and people not according to the pleasure that they give him – but according to their utility: can they or can't they make him known and, if so, to what extent. The narcissist is one-track minded (not to say obsessive). His is a world of black (being unknown and deprived of attention) and white (being famous and celebrated).

No one knows if pathological narcissism is the outcome of inherited traits, the sad result of abusive and traumatizing upbringing, or the confluence of both. Often, in the same family, with the same set of parents and an identical emotional environment - some siblings grow to be malignant narcissists, while others are perfectly "normal". Surely, this indicates a genetic predisposition of some people to develop narcissism.

It would seem reasonable to assume - though, at this stage, there is not a shred of proof - that the narcissist is born with a propensity to develop narcissistic defenses. These are triggered by abuse or trauma during the formative years in infancy or during early adolescence. By "abuse" I am referring to a spectrum of behaviors which objectify the child and treat it as an extension of the caregiver (parent) or as a mere instrument of gratification. Dotting and smothering are as abusive as beating and starving. And abuse can be dished out by peers as well as by parents, or by adult role models.

Not all celebrities are narcissists. Still, some of them surely are.

We all search for positive cues from people around us. These cues reinforce in us certain behaviour patterns. There is nothing special in the fact that the narcissist-celebrity does the same. However there are two major differences between the narcissistic and the normal personality.

The first is quantitative. The normal person is likely to welcome a moderate amount of attention – verbal and non-verbal – in the form of affirmation, approval, or admiration. Too much attention, though, is perceived as onerous and is avoided. Destructive and negative criticism is avoided altogether.

The narcissist, in contrast, is the mental equivalent of an alcoholic. He is insatiable. He directs his whole behaviour, in fact his life, to obtain these pleasurable titbits of attention. He embeds them in a coherent, completely biased, picture of himself. He uses them to regulate his labile (fluctuating) sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

To elicit constant interest, the narcissist projects on to others a [confabulated](#), fictitious version of himself, known as the [False Self](#). The False Self is everything the narcissist is not: omniscient, omnipotent, charming, intelligent, rich, or well-connected.

The narcissist then proceeds to harvest reactions to this projected image from family members, friends, co-workers, neighbours, business partners and from colleagues. If these – the adulation, admiration, attention, fear, respect, applause, affirmation – are not forthcoming, the narcissist demands them, or extorts them. Money, compliments, a favourable critique, an appearance in the media, a sexual conquest are all converted into the same currency in the narcissist's mind, into "narcissistic supply".

So, the narcissist is not really interested in publicity per se or in being famous. Truly he is concerned with the **REACTIONS** to his fame: how people watch him, notice him, talk about him, debate his actions. It "proves" to him that he exists.

The narcissist goes around "hunting and collecting" the way the expressions on people's faces change when they notice him. He places himself at the centre of attention, or even as a figure of controversy. He constantly and recurrently pesters those nearest and dearest to him in a bid to reassure himself that he is not losing his fame, his magic touch, the attention of his social milieu.

And then there is the third variety. These narcissists get off on humiliating celebrities. This interview I gave to a Brazilian magazine describes them:

Mistreating Celebrities - An Interview

Granted to Superinteressante Magazine in Brazil

Q. Fame and TV shows about celebrities usually have a huge audience. This is understandable: people like to see other successful people. But why people like to see celebrities being humiliated?

A. As far as their fans are concerned, celebrities fulfil two emotional functions: they provide a mythical narrative (a story that the fan can follow and identify with) and they function as blank screens onto which the fans project their dreams, hopes, fears, plans, values, and desires (wish fulfilment). The slightest deviation from these prescribed roles provokes enormous rage and makes us want to punish (humiliate) the "deviant" celebrities.

But why?

When the human foibles, vulnerabilities, and frailties of a celebrity are revealed, the fan feels humiliated, "cheated", hopeless, and "empty". To reassert his self-worth, the fan must establish his or her moral superiority over the erring and "sinful" celebrity. The fan must "teach the celebrity a lesson" and show the celebrity "who's boss". It is a primitive defense mechanism - narcissistic grandiosity. It puts the fan on equal footing with the exposed and "naked" celebrity.

Q. This taste for watching a person being humiliated has something to do with the attraction to catastrophes and tragedies?

A. There is always a sadistic pleasure and a morbid fascination in vicarious suffering. Being spared the pains and tribulations others go through makes the observer feel "chosen", secure, and virtuous. The higher celebrities rise, the harder they fall. There is something gratifying in hubris defied and punished.

Q. Do you believe the audience put themselves in the place of the reporter (when he asks something embarrassing to a celebrity) and become in some way revenged?

A. The reporter "represents" the "bloodthirsty" public. Belittling celebrities or watching their comeuppance is the modern equivalent of the gladiator rink. Gossip used to fulfil the same function and now the mass media broadcast live the slaughtering of fallen gods. There is no question of revenge here - just Schadenfreude, the guilty joy of witnessing your superiors penalized and "cut down to size".

Q. In your country, who are the celebrities people love to hate?

A. Israelis like to watch politicians and wealthy businessmen reduced, demeaned, and slighted. In Macedonia, where I live, all famous people, regardless of their vocation, are subject to intense, proactive, and destructive envy. This love-hate relationship with their idols, this ambivalence, is attributed by psychodynamic theories of personal development to the child's emotions towards his parents. Indeed, we transfer and displace many negative emotions we harbor onto celebrities.

Q. I would never dare asking some questions the reporters from Panico ask the celebrities. What are the characteristics of people like these reporters?

A. Sadistic, ambitious, narcissistic, lacking empathy, self-righteous, pathologically and destructively envious, with a fluctuating sense of self-worth (possibly an inferiority complex).

6. Do you believe the actors and reporters want themselves to be as famous as the celebrities they tease? Because I think this is almost happening...

A. The line is very thin. Newsmakers and newsmen and women are celebrities merely because they are public figures and regardless of their true accomplishments. A celebrity is famous for being famous. Of course, such journalists will likely to fall prey to up and coming colleagues in an endless and self-perpetuating food chain...

7. I think that the fan-celebrity relationship gratifies both sides. What are the advantages the fans get and what are the advantages the celebrities get?

A. There is an implicit contract between a celebrity and his fans. The celebrity is obliged to "act the part", to fulfil the expectations of his admirers, not to deviate from the roles that they impose and he or she accepts. In return the fans shower the celebrity with adulation. They idolize him or her and make him or her feel omnipotent, immortal, "larger than life", omniscient, superior, and sui generis (unique).

What are the fans getting for their trouble?

Above all, the ability to vicariously share the celebrity's fabulous (and, usually, partly confabulated) existence. The celebrity becomes their "representative" in fantasyland, their extension and proxy, the reification and embodiment of their deepest desires and most secret and guilty dreams. Many celebrities are also role models or father/mother figures. Celebrities are proof that there is more to life than drab and routine. That beautiful - nay, perfect - people

do exist and that they do lead charmed lives. There's hope yet - this is the celebrity's message to his fans.

The celebrity's inevitable downfall and corruption is the modern-day equivalent of the medieval morality play. This trajectory - from rags to riches and fame and back to rags or worse - proves that order and justice do prevail, that hubris invariably gets punished, and that the celebrity is no better, neither is he superior, to his fans.

Stephen:

Velcro Mothers

In your letters I have found some real nuggets of truth. The inverted narcissist rings in my being, especially since I also had a narcissistic mother who liked to 'pull my strings'. She was always trying to merge and take over whatever I did; she had no respect for personal space nor did she care about my boundary. She would always repeat to me that I could never 'repay' all that she had done for me. One of her favorites was to act hurt and huffy till I was forced to ask her what was wrong. "You know what you did wrong," she would reply, which prompted me to do a soul searching guilt trip till I either found out something I should feel guilt about or I invented something to assuage her.

NPDs are masters of guilt and manipulation. If you believe them, and that is the rub, then you fall for all of their guile and maliciousness. They are good at mixing it up, a little bit of truth with a few lies. They count on you eating it up 'hook line and sinker', till you create this voice in your head that lives on after they are gone or have died. Only with professional help can you finally get rid of the garbage they stuffed into your mind. Ultimately the victims develop coping methods to handle them, but in the mean time the damage is done; a NPD parent makes you less willing to believe in the goodness of others, while they instill their paranoia in your head, ultimately that is the worst thing they do. You no longer trust other people, so you build up barriers to normal human relationships, and the NPD parent has left the back door open so that other NPDs can come into your life. Parents are not trained to be parents; that is the shame of our society that we assume that all mothers are innately good mothers, and fathers as well. Which brings me to the next conclusion:

'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result', is attributed to Albert Einstein.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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Is this what a victim of a NPD suffers from? A hopeless desire to change the narcissist? And does the narcissist also repeat the same game plan? Charm, capture, denigrate and then start over? Sometimes I see narcissists as 'Velcro' people, trying to always attach/attract admirers to gain Narcissistic supply. The danger for a NPD is the victim suffering from Border-line Personality disorder who may become attached in a malignant - I love you, go away - pattern.

Sam:

It is called "approach-avoidance repetition complex" and is described at length in my work.

I would like to balance the picture somewhat by presenting the narcissist's take on things.

The narcissist is a person who is irreparably traumatized by the behavior of the most important people in his life: his parents, role models, or peers. By being capricious, arbitrary, and sadistically judgmental, they molded him into an adult, who fervently and obsessively tries to recreate the trauma in order to, this time around, resolve it (repetition complex).

Thus, on the one hand, the narcissist feels that his freedom depends upon re-enacting these early experiences. On the other hand, he is terrified by this prospect. Realizing that he is doomed to go through the same traumas over and over again, the narcissist distances himself by using his aggression to alienate, to humiliate and in general, to be emotionally absent.

This behavior brings about the very consequence that the narcissist so fears - abandonment. But, this way, at least, the narcissist is able to tell himself (and others) that **HE** was the one who fostered the separation, that it was fully his choice and that he was not surprised. The truth is that, governed by his internal demons, the narcissist has no real choice. The dismal future of his relationships is preordained.

The narcissist is a binary person: the carrot is the stick in his case. If he gets too close to someone emotionally, he fears ultimate and inevitable abandonment. He, thus, distances himself, acts cruelly and brings about the very abandonment that he feared in the first place.

At the risk of over-simplification: narcissism tends to breed narcissism - but only a minority of the children of narcissistic parents become narcissists. This may be due to a [genetic predisposition](#) or to different life circumstances (like not being the firstborn). But **MOST** narcissists have one or more narcissistic parents or caregivers.

The narcissistic parent regards his or her child as a multi-faceted Source of Narcissistic Supply. The child is considered and treated as an extension of the narcissist. It is through the child that the narcissist seeks to settle "open scores" with the world. The child is supposed to realise the unfulfilled dreams, wishes, and fantasies of the narcissistic parent.

This "life by proxy" can develop in two ways: the narcissist can either merge with his child or be ambivalent about him. The ambivalence is the result of a conflict between the narcissist's

wish to attain his narcissistic goals through the child and his pathological (destructive) envy of the child and his accomplishments.

To ameliorate the unease bred by this emotional ambivalence, the narcissistic parent resorts to a myriad of control mechanisms. These can be grouped into: **guilt-driven** ("I sacrificed my life for you..."), **counter-dependent** ("I need you, I cannot cope without you..."), **goal-driven** ("We have a common goal which we can and must achieve") and **explicit** ("If you do not adhere to my principles, beliefs, ideology, religion, values, if you do not obey my instructions – I will punish you").

This exercise of control helps to sustain the illusion that the child is a part of the narcissist. But maintaining the illusion calls for extraordinary levels of control (on the part of the parent) and obedience (on the part of the child). The relationship is typically symbiotic and emotionally turbulent.

The child fulfils another important narcissistic function – the provision of Narcissistic Supply. There is no denying the implied (though imaginary) immortality in having a child. The early (natural) dependence of the child on his caregivers, serves to assuage their fear of abandonment.

The narcissist tries to perpetuate this dependence, using the aforementioned control mechanisms. The child is the ultimate Secondary Narcissistic Source of Supply. He is always present, he admires the narcissist, he witnesses the narcissist's moments of triumph and grandeur.

Owing to his wish to be loved he can be extorted into constant giving. To the narcissist, a child is a dream come true, but only in the most egotistical sense. When the child is perceived as "reneging" on his main obligation (to provide his narcissistic parent with a constant supply of attention) – the parent's emotional reaction is harsh and revealing.

It is when the narcissistic parent is disenchanted with his child that we see the true nature of this pathological relationship. The child is totally objectified. The narcissist reacts to a breach in this unwritten contract with wells of aggression and aggressive transformations: contempt, rage, emotional and psychological abuse, and even physical violence. He tries to annihilate the real "disobedient" child and substitute it with the subservient, edifying, former version.

Stephen:

NPD and Post Modernism

Last weekend I went to see a newly released movie entitled, "What the Bleep do we Know!?" The actual sizzle, the substance of the interviews, took up about a half hour. This was serious business they were talking about; quantum mechanics, the brain and spirituality. The people being interviewed were not Nobel Prize winners. Not that it mattered as an award is not a guarantee of quality of insight into everything or of someone knowing how to change your spark plugs. Notwithstanding the lack of Nobel prizes, after the movie I did look up the web site and discovered that the participants were not light-weight intellectuals.

<http://www.whatthebleep.com/>

But I had a strange feeling listening to Ramtha who was channeling a Guru; the woman allegedly had a lot of plastic surgery and a masculine deep voice. You can find more at <http://www.ramtha.com/>

Was it déjà vu? The movie sounded like Post Modern Philosophic sophism in other words a bit of science, a bit of spirituality and all mixed up to sound appetizing if not confusing. There was no logic to the movie nor to the arguments; any BBC TV science program would be more logical. So much money spent on convincing us of what? When I quit my Doctoral studies, I left behind an academia that was infected with Post Modern 'tripe'. Or as an editorial in the New York Times called it, 'The mini skirts of the mind.' Someone finally burst the balloon of postmodern hype by having an article that made no sense published in a journal. <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/>

If you want to publish your own tripe you can find a post modern generator page here: <http://www.elsewhere.org/cgi-bin/postmodern>

Now, my own experience with NPD has shown me that they operate by obfuscation and confusion. Reading certain post modern philosophers is like wading through a swamp of different concepts all thrown into a soup; something like the legend of the 'stone soup' that was made to fool people into seeing and tasting something that was not there. A lot of what NPDs put out is just malarkey. In Postmodernism, there is also a lot of malarkey, although I hate to tar everyone in academia with the same brush, yet they all seem to be infected with postmodern speak. The intellectual also likes to appear more intelligent by quoting obtuse references, much like the NPD, and puts forth a superior front. In some cases there is solid wood behind the writings but in other cases, it is so much froth. Of course I could be accused of the same thing. Let us hope that I will steer clear of such foolishness. Let me rephrase that, let us steer clear of obfuscation.

Sam:

Narcissists are attracted to [certain professions](#), the "public intellectual" being one of these. But what you describe is part and parcel of a larger phenomenon - the narcissist's misuse and abuse of language.

In the narcissist's surrealistic world, even language is pathologized. It mutates into a weapon of self-defence, a verbal fortification, a medium without a message, replacing words with duplicitous and ambiguous vocables.

Narcissists (and, often, by contagion, their unfortunate victims) don't talk, or communicate. They fend off. They hide and evade and avoid and disguise. In their planet of capricious and arbitrary unpredictability, of shifting semiotic and semantic dunes - they perfect the ability to say nothing in lengthy, Castro-like speeches.

The ensuing convoluted sentences are arabesques of meaninglessness, acrobatics of evasion, lack of commitment elevated to an ideology. The narcissist prefers to wait and see what waiting brings. It is the postponement of the inevitable that leads to the inevitability of postponement as a strategy of survival.

It is often impossible to really understand a narcissist. The evasive syntax fast deteriorates into ever more labyrinthine structures. The grammar tortured to produce the verbal Doppler shifts essential to disguise the source of the information, its distance from reality, the speed of its degeneration into rigid "official" versions.

Buried under the lush flora and fauna of idioms without an end, the language erupts, like some exotic rash, an autoimmune reaction to its infection and contamination. Like vile weeds it spread throughout, strangling with absent minded persistence the ability to understand, to feel, to agree, to disagree and to debate, to present arguments, to compare notes, to learn and to teach.

Narcissists, therefore, never talk to others - rather, they talk at others, or lecture them. They exchange subtexts, camouflage-wrapped by elaborate, florid, texts. They read between the lines, spawning a multitude of private languages, prejudices, superstitions, conspiracy theories, rumours, phobias and hysterias. Theirs is a solipsistic world - where communication is permitted only with oneself and the aim of language is to throw others off the scent or to obtain Narcissistic Supply.

This has profound implications. Communication through unequivocal, unambiguous, information-rich symbol systems is such an integral and crucial part of our world - that its absence is not postulated even in the remotest galaxies which grace the skies of science fiction. In this sense, narcissists are nothing short of aliens. It is not that they employ a different language, a code to be deciphered by a new Freud. It is also not the outcome of upbringing or socio-cultural background.

It is the fact that language is put by narcissists to a different use - not to communicate but to obscure, not to share but to abstain, not to learn but to defend and resist, not to teach but to preserve ever less tenable monopolies, to disagree without incurring wrath, to criticize without commitment, to agree without appearing to do so. Thus, an "agreement" with a narcissist is a vague expression of intent at a given moment - rather than the clear listing of long term, iron-cast and mutual commitments.

The rules that govern the narcissist's universe are loopholed incomprehensibles, open to an exegesis so wide and so self-contradictory that it renders them meaningless. The narcissist often hangs himself by his own verbose Gordic knots, having stumbled through a minefield of logical fallacies and endured self inflicted inconsistencies. Unfinished sentences hover in the air, like vapour above a semantic swamp.

In the case of the inverted narcissist, who was suppressed and abused by overbearing caregivers, there is the strong urge not to offend. Intimacy and inter-dependence are great. Parental or peer pressures are irresistible and result in conformity and self-deprecation. Aggressive tendencies, strongly repressed in the social pressure cooker, teem under the veneer of forced civility and violent politeness. Constructive ambiguity, a non-committal "everyone is good and right", an atavistic variant of moral relativism and tolerance bred of fear and of contempt - are all at the service of this eternal vigilance against aggressive drives, at the disposal of a never ending peacekeeping mission.

With the classic narcissist, language is used cruelly and ruthlessly to ensnare one's enemies, to sow confusion and panic, to move others to emulate the narcissist ("projective identification"), to leave the listeners in doubt, in hesitation, in paralysis, to gain control, or to

punish. Language is enslaved and forced to lie. The language is appropriated and expropriated. It is considered to be a weapon, an asset, a piece of lethal property, a traitorous mistress to be gang raped into submission.

With cerebral narcissists, language is a lover. The infatuation with its very sound leads to a pyrotechnic type of speech which sacrifices its meaning to its music. Its speakers pay more attention to the composition than to the content. They are swept by it, intoxicated by its perfection, inebriated by the spiralling complexity of its forms. Here, language is an inflammatory process. It attacks the very tissues of the narcissist's relationships with artistic fierceness. It invades the healthy cells of reason and logic, of cool headed argumentation and level headed debate.

Language is a leading indicator of the psychological and institutional health of social units, such as the family, or the workplace. Social capital can often be measured in cognitive (hence, verbal-lingual) terms. To monitor the level of comprehensibility and lucidity of texts is to study the degree of sanity of family members, co-workers, friends, spouses, mates, and colleagues. There can exist no hale society without unambiguous speech, without clear communications, without the traffic of idioms and content that is an inseparable part of every social contract. Our language determines how we perceive our world. It IS our mind and our consciousness. The narcissist, in this respect, is a great social menace.

Thank you for a refreshing interlude and for the timely reminder above!

Sam

Thursday, February 17, 2005, Letter Ten to [Sam Vaknin](#) from [Stephen McDonnell](#)

After you read Stephen's Letter - Click [here](#) to read [Sam's Response](#)

Dear Sam,

You asked me the following questions:

- 1.Are narcissists intrinsically evil?
- 2.Should mental health professionals involve moral judgment in their work?

An article I sent you on discussions at the most recent meeting of the American Psychiatry Association sparked these questions. Several news reports came out of this meeting, for a February 8, 2005 article devoted to Evil with links -go here:

[The New York Times > Health > Mental Health](#)

No doubt you have read what Dr. Peck wrote about malignant narcissists and evil.

Here is an interesting commentary on that:

[The Psychology of Evil](#)

In my mind's eye I envision a bunch of psychiatrists discussing evil, and trying to formulate a range of evil. It would go from micro to macro, and have degrees of harm I suppose. They also questioned their ability to make moral judgments on evil. Many of those present have treated some very sick people. It must be disturbing for them to see into the blackness of the human psyche and they probably want to know the how and why of evil. So do I. You want to know if a narcissist is fated to be evil as if a narcissist is the only one capable of evil.

Let us explore.

No doubt I could fill a volume on morals, morality, good and evil, selfishness and altruism, but to what end? A wise woman told me once that there is not right and wrong but only "right and real". Reality is where moral judgment and common sense meet. Does this mean the end justifies the means? Is there a range of good and evil? Is this a way of excusing ourselves and others? Is this a 'slippery slope' that we are told will lead to damnation? Do NPDs see issues in binary fashion, good and evil, right and wrong? Should we as 'normal humans' judge others who do not have the same set of mental filters that allow us to judge others (He who has not sinned should throw the first stone.)? We have different rules for children (in the legal system) as well as for animals, so why not give a little slack to NPDs and others who suffer from mental disease? He or she was mentally deranged when they committed the crime or crimes - so innocent by insanity? Where does one draw the line? What is evil? I have written extensively on my site about this, but why not address it again?

Definition of evil:

Adjective

1. Profoundly immoral or wrong
2. Deliberately causing great harm, pain, or upset
3. Connected with the Devil or other powerful destructive forces
4. Characterized by, bringing, or signifying bad luck
5. Characterized by a desire to cause hurt or harm

6. Very unpleasant Noun

1. The quality of being profoundly immoral or wrong
2. The force held to bring about harmful, painful, or unpleasant events
3. A situation or thing that is very unpleasant, harmful, or morally wrong Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation.

The quote I like to use concerning the harm of evil is the following:

Half the harm that is done in this world Is due to people who want to feel important They don't mean to do harm - but the harm does not interest them.

Or they do not see it, or they justify it Because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves.

T. S. Eliot

The human being is endowed with intelligence and arguably a moral compass that enables most people to tell right from wrong, and to have empathy for others. Even with this moral compass - the conscious - there is no guarantee that what we do will produce 'good' as fate likes to play tricks on people who are right and righteous. Let me illustrate my point by giving you some outrageous examples.

1. Water in Bangladesh is polluted. A UN program was developed and carried out to drill wells and install pumps to reach the water table and produce clean water. After much fanfare trumpeting the good work of the well water/pump program it was discovered that this water was contaminated with lethal amounts of lead. It is now recommended that the people boil their polluted water and not use the well water.

2. In High school one of my Jewish friends astounded me when he said that his Rabbi had declared to the congregation that Hitler had saved the Jews. He went on to explain that European Jewry was becoming assimilated before WWII and the holocaust produced a renewed interest in the faith and a renewal.

3. US Millionaire Jim Rogers (co founder of the Quantum fund with George Soros, and whom Time magazine called "the Indiana Jones of finance") predicts that Asian women will be wielding incredible political and economic power in 10 years from now due to the selection of male fetuses by echo imaging and aborting female fetuses. The disequilibrium in the sex ratios in Asian countries will eventually place surviving women into a position to choose. (National Post Business, February 2005)

Perhaps these are examples of survival of the fittest - the path to Hell is paved with good intentions - yet in each case there were decisions made wisely or with evil intent, which produced (or may produce) different results than expected. They are also examples of the impact of decisions on large populations. Today the Kyoto Protocol went into effect but the alleged largest contributor to global warming did not sign it so it may produce no or negative results. Or maybe not. Maybe it is too late to even stop the warming trend - some people do not believe in it anyway.

A few people who think they know what is best for others sometimes precipitate large-scale events. What if these people are psychopaths, or suffering from NPD, we could attribute the eventual good or bad to them. But who decides what is good or bad, the winners? With historical distance, it is obvious that genocide was carried out in the Americas by colonial and postcolonial governments against the native populations. In modern day Africa the AIDS epidemic will surely wipe out a huge amount of the population. Wars and local terrorist attacks are taking place all over the world, perpetuated by people who believe they are right. Whole populations go on rampages of killing and torture, take the case of Rwanda, motivated by the feeling that they are justified.

Looking at history, one can say that evil is endemic to humankind, couldn't we? But is that true? Is there a way of measuring 'evil' in large populations?

In military science, the art of killing is difficult to teach. In fact most soldiers in the battlefield never shoot, and if they do, they miss their human targets. People have to be trained to kill. The occasional psychopath enjoys it, because he has no empathy for his victim. Most people have to be brain washed into hating. Most people have feelings and care for their fellow human being. Perhaps evil is innate to humans, but is not commonly manifest and it requires an outside agency to provoke it. Fear of danger, moral debauchery, drugs, mental disease You get the picture.

Macro to micro evil:

Last week I was listening to a group of people who were discussing altruism and Jesus Christ. One person remarked that it would be hard to recognize God if He walked amongst us, whereby the narcissist in the group pointed to himself and declared, "Just look at me." It was a not surprising that he would say that, but the most unusual thing about the discussion group was the silence of the other narcissists. Morality, religion and good and evil make them uncomfortable. Unless they are the ones dictating it.

Years ago a TV evangelist was caught with his pants down visiting prostitutes; this same person had been railing against sin and sodomy, yet he felt he was above morality. In my email box I found a message from a preacher who had been referred to it, and he went on to say one had to obey the Bible etc. which led me to believe he was setting himself up as the ultimate arbitrator with God like powers. I wasn't surprised. A web site I found long time ago was dedicated to preachers who suffered from NPD and how to recognize them. After watching a [TV documentary on the sexologist Dr. Kinsey](#) I came to the conclusion that he was projecting onto the rest of the world his vision, and in some cases it was alleged that he doctored his research. He encouraged sexuality and freedom from sexual repression to the point where his assistants and wife were in an entangled relationship. Again, the rules were broken and then rewritten to fit another person's vision. What type of person likes to rewrite the rules? A narcissist?

Who comes up with rules of morality?

There are possibly three ways that we develop morality.

A) If one believes the Judeo Christian bible, humanity (in the guise of Eve) ate from the tree of knowledge and learned how to tell right from wrong. This had been reserved for God and the Devil. It seems like a very paltry gift to eat an apple - feel shame at your nakedness and only be able to know good and evil.

B) If we look at the parallel of Darwinian evolution, humans are naked and developed a sense of morality. Either way, we are moral beings. Animals have the instincts to survive. I doubt if animals have anything approaching our moral values, or even a need for them. Morality may even be counter-productive to survival of humans.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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C) Humans have morals when they exercise that part of the brain that deals with moral judgment. The famous case in Vermont of Phineas Gage whose temporal lobes were damaged in a freak accident and whose personality changed, may point us towards an anatomical basis for morality if not personality (lots of pages on the web devoted to this). The whole history of lobotomy and of ECT is morbidly interesting, with a new chapter being written using local electromagnetic impulses to bring about cures.

One wonderful image I hold on to about how humans differ from animals is the scene in the science fiction novel DUNE, where the Bene Gesserit (a kind of female Jesuit order) are testing the hero by having him put his hand into a box that causes him intolerable pain. If he can master the pain, something that animals are unable to do, then he will pass the test and be considered 'human', if he withdraws his hand he will be considered an animal and they will kill him. Frank Herbert had a Darwinian view of the future, where people would evolve and develop super powers, yet he endowed them with human faults; they were not perfect. They would have to use their moral judgment, and evil would still exist, evolving as narcissist-like villains.

One of the sayings from DUNE that I recall when faced with an invasive and destructive narcissist is this: *"Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past me I will turn to see fear's path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."*

The Bible also says, "I will fear no evil." Is this because evil exists? Or is it our view of the world/people as good and evil? Or should we rather say, I will fear no NPD?

Where do narcissists come into the picture of evil?

On your web pages devoted to Narcissistic Personality Disorders, you divide NPDs into cerebral and the somatic. Then you go on to subdivide them into thinner slices of types, but it is the same basic cake we are talking about. Or should I say apple?

In my dealings with NPDs I have seen many kinds, of different sexes, races and religions. They also vary in intelligence. They seem to all have a "native" cunning that enables them to find out who can be manipulated and used to supply them with admiration and amusement. They all project a superior air, as if they are not the normal run of the mill human being. Yet they will debase themselves if necessary and mix with common people, charming them with

their wit. But only if they feel the necessity, and only if it is worth their time and effort. These are bottom line people. Zero sum economics - not altruism - reigns in the NPD mind. You lose, they win, end of game. To see narcissists in a moral light is specious. Their victims make excuses for them, trying to 'understand' using their own moral gauges. They respect brute force or people who turn the tables on them; because you enter into their moral-less domain of playing. By debasing yourself - by playing by their rules - they win.

There are exceptions to this rule. They can teach you some very valuable lessons. A narcissist woman taught me how to lie. She showed me that if you suspend your humanity, if you only care about the outcome and could care less about who gets hurt, then you are able to play a better hand of poker. In brinkmanship, when you are faced with a more powerful foe, lying is a powerful weapon. You lie by simply showing you are not afraid. You can hypnotize yourself into believing that you can do some impossible task, or change your life style. This is what NPDs do on a daily basis - self-hypnosis. They also take the terrible feelings they have for themselves and foist it on others. This shedding of emotional detritus is useful for normal people, if they can do it without involving others. The narcissist uses other people (victims) as garbage bins for their emotional offal.

For years I wondered about the antics and motivations of certain people. It was easy to dismiss them as simply characters, clowns, etc; the more powerful were not so easy to ignore. Once you are involved with them by choice or by birth, the web of their deceptions is a reality, eventually you sympathize with them, their enemy is your enemy because the narcissist is always right and the other person, persons, or society in general, don't understand the narcissist. Once you join the NPD 'gang' you have to toe the line. What they say goes. It is the law. You may find yourself doing things you never thought possible, both legal and illegal, if you accept to ride in the roller coaster ride of their reality. (Manic Depressives also suffer this up and down type of life.)

You may think that you can put on the brakes and get off. But when you do, they, the narcissists, will hit you with guilt and their gang will reject you. So how did this happen? It may have started off with a simple handshake, and when you looked into their eyes they either looked very sincere or they avoided your look. They are wonderful at first, charming and amusing, and they compliment you, even make you feel important. The charm stage will last to you are hooked. If you are lucky they may pick you as their favorite; such attention is actually positive as long as it doesn't go to your head. In the movie "The Talented Mr. Ripley", a girlfriend says that you feel like you are in a spot light, basking in their love and attention powerful and addictive. When it is over you will feel empty as if they stole part of your soul. You have made a pact with the devil, and in the end you are left with the taste of ashes in your mouth for all those days, months, years of spending time under their influence.

You feel victimized, though you have this guilty inkling that you were part of the game and even enjoyed it. Like the people who go up to a booth at a carnival and start to play with the hope of winning, you want to believe it is not a rigged game, and that you can win. The narcissist loves to make you feel that way, as if you can win with them, but disabuse your self of that thought. No one wins with narcissists, only the therapist who treats the victims.

The victim has made a fool of themselves and is traumatized, you receive hundreds of emails from them and how many of these broken relationships end up in court? How many victims go on to live full lives, or do they commit emotional and even physical suicide? Are they forever damaged goods? The narcissist feels nothing; like a light that goes on and off,

narcissists have binary emotions, so feel no pain or guilt for what they do. Sam, I think that you are the first narcissist I have ever known who has shown some sort of sincere remorse, if at least a cognizance of what you are and have done.

They are dynamic leaders, charismatic, and impressive and if they have the intelligence and good sense, they will succeed where others fail. Often they are 'legends in their own mind' ending up as tin dictators who want to control their families, friends, and neighborhoods. Only when they become bullies do they pose a real physical threat. On the emotional field of life, they use whatever it takes to get what they want. They come across as know it alls, giving advice on all subjects, which may lead the unwary victims to their ruin.

When I introduced a friend to a NPD woman, he was bamboozled and told me how charming she was; from some recess of my subconscious came this reply, "Hitler was charming too!"

It seems to me that someone who is evil or good must first have some sense of morality. Are narcissists immoral or amoral? Do they feel pain if they hurt someone, or do they only feel pain for themselves? Do they only have empathy for themselves? In my book, a thin one that contains a few rules of conduct, I feel that the lack of empathy leads to harm. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you is a wonderful moral statement that may well have been aimed at NPDs.

Sam responds:

You hit the narcissist ... er ... the nail on the head. The root problem, the cause of most if not all narcissistic behaviors is a pronounced lack of empathy. ***Indeed, morality and possessing a moral sense are not possible without empathy!***

Following your clue, I have decided to dedicate the bulk of my response to the convoluted issue of empathy.

But first, are narcissists inherently evil?

In his bestselling "People of the Lie", Scott Peck claims that they are.

I agree with you that the concept of "evil" in this age of moral relativism is slippery and ambiguous. The "Oxford Companion to Philosophy" (Oxford University Press, 1995) defines it thus: ***"The suffering which results from morally wrong human choices."***

To qualify as evil a person (Moral Agent) must meet these requirements:

- a. That he can and does consciously choose between the (morally) right and wrong and constantly and consistently prefers the latter;
- b. That he acts on his choice irrespective of the consequences to himself and to others.

Clearly, evil must be premeditated. Francis Hutcheson and Joseph Butler argued that evil is a by-product of the pursuit of one's interest or cause at the expense of other people's interests or causes. But this ignores the critical element of conscious choice among equally efficacious alternatives. Moreover, people often pursue evil even when it jeopardizes their well-being and obstructs their interests. Sadomasochists even relish this orgy of mutual assured destruction.

Narcissists satisfy both conditions only partly. Their evil is utilitarian. They are evil only when being malevolent secures a certain outcome. Sometimes, they consciously choose the morally wrong – but not invariably so. They act on their choice even if it inflicts misery and pain on others. But they never opt for evil if they are to bear the consequences. They act maliciously because it is expedient to do so – not because it is "in their nature".

The narcissist is able to tell right from wrong and to distinguish between good and evil. In the pursuit of his interests and causes, he sometimes chooses to act wickedly. Lacking empathy, the narcissist is rarely remorseful. Because he feels entitled, exploiting others is second nature. The narcissist abuses others absent-mindedly, off-handedly, as a matter of fact.

The narcissist objectifies people and treats them as expendable commodities to be discarded after use. Admittedly, that, in itself, is evil. Yet, it is the mechanical, thoughtless, heartless face of narcissistic abuse – devoid of human passions and of familiar emotions – that renders it so alien, so frightful and so repellent.

We are often shocked less by the actions of narcissist than by the way he acts. In the absence of a vocabulary rich enough to capture the subtle hues and gradations of the spectrum of narcissistic depravity, we default to habitual adjectives such as "good" and "evil". Such intellectual laziness does this pernicious phenomenon and its victims little justice.

Read [Ann Bradley's view](#) on this very issue.

But, why are we fascinated by Evil and Evildoers and are inexorably attracted to them, as you describe?

The common explanation is that one is fascinated with evil and evildoers because, through them, one vicariously expresses the repressed, dark, and evil parts of one's own personality. Evildoers, according to this theory, represent the "shadow" nether lands of our selves and, thus, they constitute our antisocial alter egos. Being drawn to wickedness is an act of rebellion against social strictures and the crippling bondage that is modern life. It is a mock synthesis of our Dr. Jekyll with our Mr. Hyde. It is a cathartic exorcism of our inner demons.

Yet, even a cursory examination of this account reveals its flaws.

Far from being taken as a familiar, though suppressed, element of our psyche, evil is mysterious. Though preponderant, villains are often labeled "monsters" - abnormal, even supernatural aberrations. It took Hanna Arendt two thickset tomes to remind us that evil is banal and bureaucratic, not fiendish and omnipotent.

In our minds, evil and magic are intertwined. Sinners seem to be in contact with some alternative reality where the laws of Man are suspended. Sadism, however deplorable, is also admirable because it is the reserve of [Nietzsche's Supermen](#), an indicator of personal strength and resilience. A heart of stone lasts longer than its carnal counterpart.

Throughout human history, ferocity, mercilessness, and lack of [empathy](#) were extolled as virtues and enshrined in social institutions such as the army and the courts. The doctrine of Social Darwinism and the advent of moral relativism and deconstruction did away with ethical absolutism. The thick line between right and wrong thinned and blurred and, sometimes, vanished.

Evil nowadays is merely another form of entertainment, a species of pornography, a sanguineous art. Evildoers enliven our gossip, color our drab routines and extract us from dreary existence and its depressive correlates. It is a little like collective self-injury. Self-mutilators report that parting their flesh with razor blades makes them feel alive and reawakened. In this synthetic universe of ours, evil and gore permit us to get in touch with real, raw, painful life.

The higher our desensitized threshold of arousal, the more profound the evil that fascinates us. Like the stimuli-addicts that we are, we increase the dosage and consume added tales of malevolence and sinfulness and immorality. Thus, in the role of spectators, we safely maintain our sense of moral supremacy and self-righteousness even as we wallow in the minutest details of the vilest crimes.

I think that narcissists are not evil. But they sure are evildoers. You can **DO** evil without **BEING** evil. [Insane people](#) are like that, as you so correctly point out. Narcissists are **MORALLY INSANE**.

I believe that narcissists commit evil deeds for two reasons:

- I. They lack empathy
- II. They suppress their emotions and true self.

The [Encyclopaedia Britannica \(1999 edition\)](#) defines empathy as:

"The ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions. It is a term coined in the early 20th century, equivalent to the German Einfühlung and modelled on "sympathy." The term is used with special (but not exclusive) reference to aesthetic experience. The most obvious example, perhaps, is that of the actor or singer who genuinely feels the part he is performing. With other works of art, a spectator may, by a kind of introjection, feel himself involved in what he observes or contemplates. The use of empathy is an important part of the counselling technique developed by the American psychologist Carl Rogers."

Empathy is predicated upon and must, therefore, incorporate the following elements:

- a. Imagination which is dependent on the ability to imagine;
- b. The existence of an accessible Self (self-awareness or self-consciousness);
- c. The existence of an available other (other-awareness, recognizing the outside world);
- d. The existence of accessible feelings, desires, ideas and representations of actions or their outcomes both in the empathizing Self ("Empathor") and in the Other, the object of empathy ("Empathee");
- e. The availability of an aesthetic frame of reference;
- f. The availability of a moral frame of reference.

While (a) is presumed to be universally available to all agents (though in varying degrees) - the existence of the other components of empathy should not be taken for granted.

Conditions (b) and (c), for instance, are not satisfied by people who suffer from personality disorders, such as the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder](#). Condition (d) is not met in autistic

people (e.g., those who suffer from the Asperger syndrome). Conditions (e) is so totally dependent on the specifics of the culture, period and society in which it exists - that it is rather meaningless and ambiguous as a yardstick. Condition (f) suffer from both afflictions: it is both culture-dependent AND is not satisfied in many people (such as those who suffer from the Antisocial Personality Disorder and who are devoid of any conscience or moral sense).

Thus, the very existence of empathy should be questioned. It is often confused with intersubjectivity. The latter is defined thus by *"The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, 1995"*:

"This term refers to the status of being somehow accessible to at least two (usually all, in principle) minds or 'subjectivities'. It thus implies that there is some sort of communication between those minds; which in turn implies that each communicating minds aware not only of the existence of the other but also of its intention to convey information to the other. The idea, for theorists, is that if subjective processes can be brought into agreement, then perhaps that is as good as the (unattainable?) status of being objective - completely independent of subjectivity. The question facing such theorists is whether intersubjectivity is definable without presupposing an objective environment in which communication takes place (the 'wiring' from subject A to subject B). At a less fundamental level, however, the need for intersubjective verification of scientific hypotheses has been long recognized". (page 414).

On the face of it, the difference between intersubjectivity and empathy is double:

- a. Intersubjectivity requires an EXPLICIT, communicated agreement between at least two subjects.
- b. It involves EXTERNAL things (so called "objective" entities).

These "differences" are artificial. This how empathy is defined in "Psychology - An Introduction (Ninth Edition) by Charles G. Morris, Prentice Hall, 1996":

"Closely related to the ability to read other people's emotions is empathy - the arousal of an emotion in an observer that is a vicarious response to the other person's situation... Empathy depends not only on one's ability to identify someone else's emotions but also on one's capacity to put oneself in the other person's place and to experience an appropriate emotional response. Just as sensitivity to non-verbal cues increases with age, so does empathy: The cognitive and perceptual abilities required for empathy develop only as a child matures... (page 442)

In empathy training, for example, each member of the couple is taught to share inner feelings and to listen to and understand the partner's feelings before responding to them. The empathy technique focuses the couple's attention on feelings and requires that they spend more time listening and less time in rebuttal." (page 576).

Thus empathy does require the communication of feelings AND an agreement on the appropriate outcome of the communicated emotions (=affective agreement). In the absence of such agreement, we are faced with [inappropriate affect](#) (laughing at a funeral, for instance).

Moreover, empathy does relate to external objects and is provoked by them. There is no empathy in the absence of an empathetee. Granted, intersubjectivity is intuitively applied to the

inanimate while empathy is applied to the living (animals, humans, even plants). But this is a difference in human preferences - not in definition.

Empathy can, thus, be re-defined as a form of intersubjectivity which involves living things as "objects" to which the communicated intersubjective agreement relates. It is wrong to limit empathy to the communication of emotion. It is the intersubjective, concomitant experience of BEING. The empathor empathizes not only with the empathee's emotions but also with his physical state and other parameters of existence (pain, hunger, thirst, suffocation, sexual pleasure etc.).

This leads to the important (and perhaps intractable) psychophysical question.

Intersubjectivity relates to external objects but the subjects communicate and reach an agreement regarding the way THEY have been affected by the objects.

Empathy relates to external objects (the Others) but the subjects communicate and reach an agreement regarding the way THEY would have felt had they BEEN the object.

This is no minor difference, if it, indeed, exists. But does it really exist?

What is it that we feel in empathy? Is it OUR emotions/sensations merely provoked by an external trigger (classic intersubjectivity) or is it a TRANSFER of the object's feelings/sensations to us?

Such a transfer being physically impossible (as far as we know) - we are forced to adopt the former model. Empathy is the set of reactions - emotional and cognitive - to triggering by an external object (the other). It is the equivalent of resonance in the physical sciences. But we have NO WAY to ascertain the "wavelength" of such resonance is identical in both subjects. In other words, we have no way to verify that the feelings or sensation invoked in the two (or more) subjects are one and the same. What I call "sadness" may not be what you call "sadness". Colours have unique, uniform, independently measurable properties (like energy). Still, no one can prove that what I see as "red" is what another calls "red" (as is the case with Daltonists). If this is true where "objective", measurable, phenomena are concerned - it is infinitely true in the case of emotions or feelings.

We are, therefore, forced to refine our definition:

Empathy is a form of intersubjectivity which involves living things as "objects" to which the communicated intersubjective agreement relates. It is the intersubjective, concomitant experience of BEING. The empathor empathizes not only with the empathee's emotions but also with his physical state and other parameters of existence (pain, hunger, thirst, suffocation, sexual pleasure etc.).

BUT

The meaning attributed to the words used by the parties to the intersubjective agreement known as empathy is totally dependent upon each party. The same words are used, the same denotates - but it cannot be proven that the same connotates, the same experiences, emotions and sensations are being discussed or communicated.

Language (and, by extension, art and culture) serve to introduce us to other points of view ("what is it like to be someone else" to paraphrase Thomas Nagle). By providing a bridge between the subjective (inner experience) and the objective (words, images, sounds) - language facilitates social exchange and interaction. It is a dictionary which translates one's subjective private language to the coin of the public medium. Knowledge and language are, thus, the ultimate social glue, though both are based on approximations and guesses (see George Steiner's "After Babel").

But, whereas the intersubjective agreement regarding measurements and observations concerning external objects IS verifiable or falsifiable using INDEPENDENT tools (e.g., lab experiments) - the intersubjective agreement which concerns itself with the emotions, sensations and experiences of subjects as communicated by them IS NOT verifiable or falsifiable using INDEPENDENT tools. The interpretation of this second kind of agreement is dependent upon introspection and an assumption that identical words used by different subjects still possess identical meaning. This assumption is not falsifiable (or verifiable). It is neither true nor false. It is a probabilistic statement with no probabilities attached. It is, in short, a meaningless statement. As a result, empathy itself is meaningless.

In human-speak, if you say that you are said and I empathize with you it means that we have an agreement. I regard you as my object. You communicate to me a property of yours ("sadness"). This triggers in me a recollection of "what is sadness" or "what is to be sad". I say that I know what you mean, I have been sad before, I know what it is like to be sad. I empathize with you. We agree about being sad. We have an intersubjective agreement.

(continued below)

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Alas, such an agreement is meaningless. We cannot (yet) measure sadness, quantify it, crystallize it, access it in any way from the outside. We are totally and absolutely reliant on your introspection and my introspection. There is no way anyone can prove that my "sadness" is even remotely similar to your sadness. I may be feeling or experiencing something that you might find hilarious and not sad at all. Still, I call it "sadness" and I empathize with you.

This would not have been that grave if empathy hadn't been the cornerstone of morality.

[The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999 Edition:](#)

"Empathy and other forms of social awareness are important in the development of a moral sense. Morality embraces a person's beliefs about the appropriateness or goodness of what he does, thinks, or feels... Childhood is ... the time at which moral standards begin to develop in a process that often extends well into adulthood. The American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg hypothesized that people's development of moral standards passes through stages that can be grouped into three moral levels...

At the third level, that of postconventional moral reasoning, the adult bases his moral standards on principles that he himself has evaluated and that he accepts as inherently valid, regardless of society's opinion. He is aware of the arbitrary, subjective nature of social standards and rules, which he regards as relative rather than absolute in authority.

Thus the bases for justifying moral standards pass from avoidance of punishment to avoidance of adult disapproval and rejection to avoidance of internal guilt and self-recrimination. The person's moral reasoning also moves toward increasingly greater social scope (i.e., including more people and institutions) and greater abstraction (i.e., from reasoning about physical events such as pain or pleasure to reasoning about values, rights, and implicit contracts)."

But, if moral reasoning is based on introspection and empathy - it is, indeed, dangerously relative and not objective in any known sense of the word. Empathy is a unique agreement on the emotional and experiential content of two or more introspective processes in two or more subjective. Such an agreement can never have any meaning, even as far as the parties to it are concerned. They can never be sure that they are discussing the same emotions or experiences. There is no way to compare, measure, observe, falsify or verify (prove) that the "same" emotion is experienced identically by the parties to the empathy agreement. Empathy is meaningless and introspection involves a private language despite what Wittgenstein had to say. Morality is thus reduced to a set of meaningless private languages.

The [Encyclopaedia Britannica:](#)

"... Others have argued that because even rather young children are capable of showing empathy with the pain of others, the inhibition of aggressive behaviour arises from this moral affect rather than from the mere anticipation of punishment. Some scientists have found that children differ in their individual capacity for empathy, and, therefore, some children are more sensitive to moral prohibitions than others.

Young children's growing awareness of their own emotional states, characteristics, and abilities leads to empathy--i.e., the ability to appreciate the feelings and perspectives of others. Empathy and other forms of social awareness are in turn important in the development of a moral sense... Another important aspect of children's emotional development is the formation of their self-concept, or identity--i.e., their sense of who they are and what their relation to other people is.

According to Lipps's concept of empathy, a person appreciates another person's reaction by a projection of the self into the other. In his Ästhetik, 2 vol. (1903-06; 'Aesthetics'), he made all appreciation of art dependent upon a similar self-projection into the object.'

This may well be the key. Empathy has little to do with the other person (the empathetee). It is simply the result of conditioning and socialization. In other words, when we hurt someone - we don't experience his pain. We experience OUR pain. Hurting somebody - hurts US. The reaction of pain is provoked in US by OUR own actions. We have been taught a learned response of feeling pain when we inflict it upon another. But we have also been taught to feel responsible for our fellow beings (guilt). So, we experience pain whenever another person claims to experience it as well. We feel guilty.

In sum:

To use the example of pain, we experience it in tandem with another person because we feel guilty or somehow responsible for his condition. A learned reaction is activated and we experience (our kind of) pain as well. We communicate it to the other person and an agreement of empathy is struck between us.

We attribute feelings, sensations and experiences to the object of our actions. It is the psychological defence mechanism of projection. Unable to conceive of inflicting pain upon ourselves - we displace the source. It is the other's pain that we are feeling, we keep telling ourselves, not our own.

The [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#):

"Perhaps the most important aspect of children's emotional development is a growing awareness of their own emotional states and the ability to discern and interpret the emotions of others. The last half of the second year is a time when children start becoming aware of their own emotional states, characteristics, abilities, and potential for action; this phenomenon is called self-awareness... (coupled with strong narcissistic behaviours and traits - SV)...

This growing awareness of and ability to recall one's own emotional states leads to empathy, or the ability to appreciate the feelings and perceptions of others. Young children's dawning awareness of their own potential for action inspires them to try to direct (or otherwise affect) the behaviour of others...

...With age, children acquire the ability to understand the perspective, or point of view, of other people, a development that is closely linked with the empathic sharing of others' emotions...

One major factor underlying these changes is the child's increasing cognitive sophistication. For example, in order to feel the emotion of guilt, a child must appreciate the fact that he could have inhibited a particular action of his that violated a moral standard. The awareness that one can impose a restraint on one's own behaviour requires a certain level of cognitive maturation, and, therefore, the emotion of guilt cannot appear until that competence is attained."

That empathy is a **REACTION** to external stimuli that is fully contained within the empathor and then projected onto the empathee - is clearly demonstrated by "inborn empathy". It is the ability to exhibit empathy and altruistic behaviour in response to facial expressions. Newborns react this way to their mother's facial expression of sadness or distress.

This serves to prove that empathy has very little to do with the feelings, experiences or sensations of the other (the empathee). Surely, the infant has no idea what it is like to feel sad and definitely not what it is like for his mother to feel sad. In this case, it is a complex reflexive reaction. Later on, empathy is still rather reflexive, the result of conditioning.

The [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) quotes fascinating research which dramatically proves the object-independent nature of empathy. Empathy is an internal reaction, an internal process, triggered by external cue provided by animate objects. It is communicated to the empathee - other by the empathor but the communication and the resulting agreement ("I know how you feel therefore we agree on how you feel") is rendered meaningless by the absence of a monovalent, unambiguous dictionary.

"An extensive series of studies indicated that positive emotion feelings enhance empathy and altruism. It was shown by the American psychologist Alice M. Isen that relatively small favours or bits of good luck (like finding money in a coin telephone or getting an unexpected gift) induced positive emotion in people and that such emotion regularly increased the subjects' inclination to sympathize or provide help."

Several studies have demonstrated that positive emotion facilitates creative problem solving. One of these studies showed that positive emotion enabled subjects to name more uses for common objects. Another showed that positive emotion enhanced creative problem solving by enabling subjects to see relations among objects (and other people - SV) that would otherwise go unnoticed. A number of studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of positive emotion on thinking, memory, and action in pre-school and older children."

If empathy increases with positive emotion (a result of good luck, for instance) - then it has little to do with its objects and a lot to do with the person in whom it is provoked.

Here is an Interview granted to the National Post, Toronto, Canada, July 2003:

Q. How important is empathy to proper psychological functioning?

A. Empathy is more important socially than it is psychologically. The absence of empathy - for instance in the [Narcissistic](#) and Antisocial personality disorders - predisposes people to exploit and abuse others. Empathy is the bedrock of our sense of morality. Arguably, aggressive behavior is as inhibited by empathy at least as much as it is by anticipated punishment.

But the existence of empathy in a person is also a sign of self-awareness, a healthy identity, a well-regulated sense of self-worth, and self-love (in the positive sense). Its absence denotes emotional and cognitive immaturity, an inability to love, to truly relate to others, to respect their boundaries and accept their needs, feelings, hopes, fears, choices, and preferences as autonomous entities.

Q. How is empathy developed?

A. It may be innate. Even toddlers seem to empathize with the pain - or happiness - of others (such as their caregivers). Empathy increases as the child forms a self-concept (identity). The more aware the infant is of his or her emotional states, the more he explores his limitations and capabilities - the more prone he is to projecting this new found knowledge unto others. By attributing to people around him his new gained insights about himself, the child develop a moral sense and inhibits his anti-social impulses. The development of empathy is, therefore, a part of the process of socialization.

But, as the American psychologist Carl Rogers taught us, empathy is also learned and inculcated. We are coached to feel guilt and pain when we inflict suffering on another person. Empathy is an attempt to avoid our own self-imposed agony by projecting it onto another.

Q. Is there an increasing dearth of empathy in society today? Why do you think so?

A. The social institutions that reified, propagated and administered empathy have imploded. The nuclear family, the closely-knit extended clan, the village, the neighborhood, the Church- have all unraveled. Society is atomized and anomic. The resulting alienation fostered a wave of antisocial behavior, both criminal and "legitimate". The survival value of empathy is on the decline. It is far wiser to be cunning, to cut corners, to deceive, and to abuse - than to be empathic. Empathy has largely dropped from the contemporary curriculum of socialization.

In a desperate attempt to cope with these inexorable processes, behaviors predicated on a lack of empathy have been pathologized and "medicalized". The sad truth is that narcissistic or antisocial conduct is both normative and rational. No amount of "diagnosis", "treatment", and medication can hide or reverse this fact. Ours is a cultural malaise which permeates every single cell and strand of the social fabric.

Q. Is there any empirical evidence we can point to of a decline in empathy?

Empathy cannot be measured directly - but only through proxies such as criminality, terrorism, charity, violence, antisocial behavior, related mental health disorders, or abuse.

Moreover, it is extremely difficult to separate the effects of deterrence from the effects of empathy.

If I don't batter my wife, torture animals, or steal - is it because I am empathetic or because I don't want to go to jail?

Rising litigiousness, zero tolerance, and skyrocketing rates of incarceration - as well as the ageing of the population - have sliced intimate partner violence and other forms of crime across the United States in the last decade. But this benevolent decline had nothing to do with increasing empathy.

The statistics are open to interpretation but it would be safe to say that the last century has been the most violent and least empathetic in human history. Wars and terrorism are on the rise, charity giving on the wane (measured as percentage of national wealth), welfare policies are being abolished, Darwinian models of capitalism are spreading. In the last two decades, mental health disorders were added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American

Psychiatric Association whose hallmark is the lack of empathy. The violence is reflected in our popular culture: movies, video games, and the media.

Empathy - supposedly a spontaneous reaction to the plight of our fellow humans - is now channeled through self-interested and bloated non-government organizations or multilateral outfits. The vibrant world of private empathy has been replaced by faceless state largesse. Pity, mercy, the elation of giving are tax-deductible. It is a sorry sight.

But lacking empathy is only one of the reasons that narcissists are amoral (and consequently, immoral). The other important reason is that narcissists are fake. They suppress their true selves and their emotions to the point that they are rendered inaccessible to them. And there can be no moral sense without active, self-aware emotions!

The distinction often made between emotions and judgements gives rise to a host of conflicting accounts of morality. Yet, in the same way that the distinction "observer-observed" is false, so is the distinction between emotions and judgements. Emotions contain judgements and judgements are formed by both emotions and the ratio. Emotions are responses to sensa (see ["The Manifold of Sense"](#)) and inevitably incorporate judgements (and beliefs) about those sensa. Some of these judgements are inherent (the outcome of biological evolution), others cultural, some unconscious, others conscious, and the result of personal experience. Judgements, on the other hand, are not compartmentalized. They vigorously interact with our emotions as they form.

The source of this artificial distinction is the confusion between moral and natural laws.

We differentiate among four kinds of "right" and "good".

The Natural Good

There is "right" in the mathematical, physical, or pragmatic sense. It is "right" to do something in a certain way. In other words, it is viable, practical, functional, it coheres with the world. Similarly, we say that it is "good" to do the "right" thing and that we "ought to" do it. It is the kind of "right" and "good" that compel us to act because we "ought to". If we adopt a different course, if we neglect, omit, or refuse to act in the "right" and "good" way, as we "ought to" - we are punished. Nature herself penalizes such violations. The immutable laws of nature are the source of the "rightness" and "goodness" of these courses of action. We are compelled to adopt them - because we have no other CHOICE. If we construct a bridge in the "right" and "good" way, as we "ought to" - it will survive. Otherwise, the laws of nature will make it collapse and, thus, punish us. We have no choice in the matter. The laws of nature constrain our moral principles as well.

The Moral Good

This lack of choice stands in stark contrast to the "good" and "right" of morality. The laws of morality cannot be compared to the laws of nature - nor are they variants or derivatives thereof. The laws of nature leave us no choice. The laws of morality rely on our choice.

Yet, the identical vocabulary and syntax we successfully employ in both cases (the pragmatic and the moral) - "right action", "good", and "ought to" - surely signify a deep and hidden connection between our dictated reactions to the laws of nature and our chosen reactions to

the laws of morality (i.e., our reactions to the laws of Man or God)? Perhaps the principles and rules of morality ARE laws of nature - but with choice added? Modern physics incorporates deterministic theories (Newton's, Einstein's) - and theories involving probability and choice (Quantum Mechanics and its interpretations, especially the Copenhagen interpretation). Why can't we conceive of moral laws as private cases (involving choice, judgements, beliefs, and emotions) of natural laws?

(continued below)

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The Hedonistic Good

If so, how can we account for the third, hedonistic, variant of "good", "right", and "ought to"? To live the "good" life may mean to maximize one's utility (i.e., happiness, or pleasure) - but not necessarily to maximize overall utility. In other words, living the good life is not always a moral pursuit (if we apply to it Utilitarian or Consequentialist yardsticks). Yet, here, too, we use the same syntax and vocabulary. We say that we want to live the "good" life and to do so, there is a "right action", which we "ought to" pursue. Is hedonism a private case of the Laws of Nature as well? This would be going too far. Is it a private case of the rules or principles of Morality? It could be - but need not be. Still, the principle of utility has place in every cogent description of morality.

The Aesthetic Good

A fourth kind of "good" is of the aesthetic brand. The language of aesthetic judgement is identical to the languages of physics, morality, and hedonism. Aesthetic values sound strikingly like moral ones and both resemble, structurally, the laws of nature. We say that beauty is "right" (symmetric, etc.), that we "ought to" maximize beauty - and this leads to the right action. Replace "beauty" with "good" in any aesthetic statement - and one gets a moral statement. Moral, natural, aesthetic, and hedonistic statements are all mutually convertible. Moreover, an aesthetic experience often leads to moral action.

An Interactive Framework

It is safe to say that, when we wish to discuss the nature of "good" and "right", the Laws of Nature serve as the privileged frame of reference. They delimit and constrain the set of possible states - pragmatic and moral. No moral, aesthetic, or hedonistic principle or rule can defy, negate, suspend, or ignore the Laws of Nature. They are the source of everything that is "good" and "right". Thus, the language we use to describe all instances of "good" and "right" is "natural". Human choice, of course, does not exist as far as the Laws of Nature go.

Nature is beautiful - symmetric, elegant, and parsimonious. Aesthetic values and aesthetic judgements of "good" (i.e., beautiful) and "right" rely heavily on the attributes of Nature. Inevitably, they employ the same vocabulary and syntax. Aesthetics is the bridge between the functional or correct "good" and "right" - and the hedonistic "good" and "right". Aesthetics is the first order of the interaction between the WORLD and the MIND. Here, choice is very limited. It is not possible to "choose" something to be beautiful. It is either beautiful or it is not (regardless of the objective or subjective source of the aesthetic judgement).

The hedonist is primarily concerned with the maximization of his happiness and pleasure. But such outcomes can be secured only by adhering to aesthetic values, by rendering aesthetic judgements, and by maintaining aesthetic standards. The hedonist craves beauty, pursues perfection, avoids the ugly - in short, the hedonist is an aesthete. Hedonism is the application of aesthetic rules, principles, values, and judgements in a social and cultural setting. Hedonism is aesthetics in context - the context of being human in a society of humans. The hedonist has a limited, binary, choice - between being a hedonist and not being one.

From here it is one step to morality. The principle of individual utility which underlies hedonism can be easily generalized to encompass Humanity as a whole. The social and cultural context is indispensable - there cannot be meaningful morality outside society. A Robinson Crusoe - at least until he spotted Friday - is an a-moral creature. Thus, morality is generalized hedonism with the added (and crucial) feature of free will and (for all practical purposes) unrestricted choice. It is what makes us really human.

There was one man who dedicated his life, both figuratively and literally, to the study of narcissism as the moral future of mankind. His name was Friedrich Nietzsche.

Allow me some extensive quotes from *"Thus Spake Zarathustra"* and *"Ecce Homo"* (translated by Walter Kaufmann):

"I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment...

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go.

Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth...

What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour when your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue.

The hour when you say, 'What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth and wretched contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself.'

The hour when you say, 'What matters my reason? Does it crave knowledge as the lion his food? It is poverty and filth and wretched contentment.'

The hour when you say, 'What matters my virtue? As yet it has not made me rage. How weary I am of my good and my evil! All that is poverty and filth and wretched contentment.'

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman - a rope over an abyss...

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under...

I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.

Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man.

'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the last man, and blinks.

The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea; the last man lives longest.

'We have invented happiness, 'say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth...

One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion.

No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.

'Formerly, all the world was mad,' say the most refined, and they blink...

One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health.

'We have invented happiness', say the last men, and they blink.'

On the Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit

Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child.

There is much that is difficult for the spirit, the strong, reverent spirit that would bear much: but the difficult and the most difficult are what its strength demands.

What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is most difficult, O heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much, that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one's haughtiness? Letting one's folly shine to mock one's wisdom?...

Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads?

Or is it this: loving those that despise us and offering a hand to the ghost that would frighten us?

All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert.

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon.

Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt."

Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: "All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more 'I will.'" Thus speaks the dragon.

My brothers, why is there a need in the spirit for the lion? Why is not the beast of burden, which renounces and is reverent, enough?

To create new values - that even the lion cannot do; but the creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty - for that, my brothers, the lion is needed. To assume the right to new values - that is the most terrifying assumption for a reverent spirit that would bear much. Verily, to him it is preying, and a matter for a beast of prey. He once loved "thou shalt" as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey.

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world."

Nietzsche's Overman is a challenge to society as a whole and to its values and value systems in particular. The latter are considered by Nietzsche to be obstacles to growth, abstract fantasies which contribute nothing positive to humanity's struggle to survive. Nietzsche is not against values and value systems as such - but against SPECIFIC values, the Judaeo-Christian ones. It relies on a transcendental, immutable, objective source of supreme, omniscient, long term benevolent source (God). Because God (an irrelevant human construct) is a-human (humans are not omniscience and omnipotent) his values are inhuman and irrelevant to our existence. They hamper the fulfilment of our potential as humans. Enter the Overman. He is a human being who generates values in accordance with data that he collects from his environment. He employs his intuition (regarding good and evil) to form values and then tests them empirically and without prejudice. Needless to say that this future human does not resort to contraptions such as the after-life or to a denial of his drives and needs in the gratification of which he takes great pleasure. In other words, the Overman is not ascetic and does not deny his self in order to alleviate his suffering by re-interpreting it ("suffering in this world is rewarded in the afterlife" as institutionalized religions are wont to say). The Overman dispenses with guilt and shame as anti-nihilistic devices. Feeling negative about oneself the pre-Overman Man is unable to joyously and uninhibitedly materialize the full range of his potentials. The ensuing frustration and repressed aggression weaken Man both physically and psychologically.

So, the Overman or Superman is NOT a post-human being. It IS a human being just like you and I but with different values. It is really an interpretative principle, an exegesis of reality, a unified theory of the meaning and fullness of being human. He has no authority outside himself, no values "out there" and fully trusts himself to tell good from evil. Simply: that which works, promotes his welfare and happiness and helps him realize his full range of potentials - is good. And everything - including values and the Overman himself - everything - is transitory, contingent, replaceable, changeable and subject to the continuous scrutiny of Darwinian natural selection. The fact that the Superman does NOT take himself and his place in the universe as granted is precisely what "overcoming" means. The Overman co-exists with the weaker and the more ignorant specimen of Mankind. Actually, the Overmen are destined to LEAD the rest of humanity and to guide it. They guide it in light of their values: self-realization, survival in strength, continual re-invention, etc. Overcoming is not only a process or a mechanism - it is also the meaning of life itself. It constitutes the reason to live.

Paradoxically, the Superman is a very social creature. He regards humanity as a bridge between the current Man or Overman and the future one. Since there is no way of predicting at birth who will end up being the next Man - life is sacred and overcoming becomes a collective effort and a social enterprise. Creation (the "will's joy") - the Superman's main and constant activity - is meaningless in the absence of a context.

Even if we ignore for a minute the strong RELIGIOUS overtones and undertones of Nietzsche's Overman belief-system - it is clear that Nietzsche provides us with no prediction regarding the future of Mankind. He simply analyses the psychological makeup of leaders and contrasts it with the superstitious, herd-like, self-defeating values of the masses.

Nietzsche was vindicated by the hedonism and individualism of the 20th century. Nazi Germany was the grossly malignant and narcissistic form of "Nietzscheanism".

Thank you, Stephen, for this particular dialog.

Thursday, February 27, 2005, Letter Eleven to [Sam Vaknin](#) from [Stephen McDonnell](#)

A little Evil will go a long way or Frienemies

Dear Sam

As a well-known expert in personality disorders, I would like to know where you would put 'toxic friend', also known as the 'underminer', the 'frenemy', alias the friendly purveyor of Schadenfreude? In one of the movies up for an Academy Award this year, Sideways, there is a perfect depiction of one, the buddy who greases the sidewalk under his friend's feet. Jane Greer, a New York psychologist wrote a book called 'How Could You Do This To Me?' labels them "a narcissistic personality who present as looking out for you but who're really out for themselves." Sounds familiar? The man or woman who is all smiles and good cheer, seductive and complimentary, and then they say 'the most undermining thing' to you, according to Mike Albo. He wrote "The Underminer or The Best Friend who Casually Destroys Your Life", a book narrated by such a character. In the animated movie "The Incredibles" he makes his appearance once again as Mr. Underminer. They are ancient characters who go way back to Ancient Greece, witness Theophrastus who wrote of them in his work Characters.

I found the previous information in an article in the Boston Globe, where Joseph P. Kahn writes how 'downers are up'. I believe that Shakespeare immortalized the frienemy in his play Othello. Yago spreads salacious gossip about Othello's wife. Moliere often uses the undermining servant to upbraid the master in his plays. We laugh - as we cry - because we know them well. They are the well meaning friend, the pal who lets slip a confidence, the well intentioned goody-goody two shoes who are part and parcel of our lives. They view themselves as upright citizens out to help their friends with 'honesty' when silence would be the better part of valor. But a gossip thinks a word not said is a word wasted not understanding the African proverb that information is like water, once it has been spilled on the sand, it can't be picked up. The telling is the joy for the frienemy they love to see the look on the other person's face when they tell their juicy tidbit! Gossip circles love to stir up a fuss - as long as they are not the target. I remember one fellow who used to sneak into the men's room to lock himself into a stall, stand on a toilette, and listen to what people were saying so he could tell our boss!

On a sliding scale of one to ten, these people are minor annoyances but given the chance they want to be big fish. They are the people who Hannah Arndt said practice the 'banality of evil'. Most never make it past standing on their local soapbox spouting their theories, but they actually believe they can change the outcome of other people's lives. I have heard the story of someone who gave a friend a record of piano playing and it ruined his friend's interest in playing the piano - he says. They give themselves too much credit - but that doesn't stop them from trying. Like Sisyphus, they keep pushing the rock of good intentions up the hill then let it roll back onto to their friend's lives. They are why we have the expression, 'with friends like these who needs enemies?'

Sam:

Wonderfully put (tongue firmly **NOT** in cheek). Frenemies! I love this coinage!

"Who's the fairest of them all?" – asks the Bad Queen in the fairy tale. Having provided the wrong answer, the mirror is smashed to smithereens. Not a bad allegory for how the narcissist treats his "friends".

Literature helps us grasp the intricate interactions between the narcissist and members of his social circle.

Both Sherlock Holmes and Hercules Poirot, the world's most renowned fiction detectives, are quintessential [narcissists](#). Both are also [schizoids](#) – they have few friends and are largely confined to their homes, engaged in solitary activities. Both have fatuous, sluggish, and anodyne sidekicks who slavishly cater to their whims and needs and provide them with an adulating gallery – Holmes' Dr. Watson and Poirot's poor Hastings.

Both Holmes and Poirot assiduously avoid the "competition" – equally sharp minds who seek their company for a fertilising intellectual exchange among equals. They feel threatened by the potential need to admit to ignorance and confess to error. Both gumshoes are self-sufficient and consider themselves peerless.

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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The Watsons and Hastings of this world provide the narcissist with an obsequious, unthreatening, audience and with the kind of unconditional and unthinking obedience that confirms to him his omnipotence. They are sufficiently vacuous to make the narcissist look sharp and omniscient – but not so asinine as to be instantly discernible as such. They are the perfect backdrop, never likely to attain centre stage and overshadow their master.

Moreover, both Holmes and Poirot sadistically – and often publicly – taunt and humiliate their Sancho Panzas, explicitly chastising them for being dim-witted. Narcissism and [sadism](#)

are psychodynamic cousins and both Watson and Hastings are perfect victims of [abuse](#): docile, understanding, [malignantly optimistic](#), self-deluding, and idolising.

Narcissists can't empathise or love and, therefore, have no friends. The narcissist is one track minded. He is interested in securing [Narcissistic Supply](#) from Narcissistic Supply Sources. He is not interested in people as such. He is incapable of empathising, is a solipsist, and recognises only himself as human. To the narcissist, all others are three dimensional cartoons, tools and instruments in the tedious and Sisyphean task of generating and consuming Narcissistic Supply.

The narcissist over-values people (when they are judged to be potential sources of such supply), uses them, devalues them (when no longer able to supply him) and discards them nonchalantly. This behaviour pattern tends to alienate and to distance people.

Gradually, the social circle of the narcissist dwindles (and ultimately vanishes). [People around him](#) who are not turned off by the ugly succession of his acts and attitudes – are rendered desperate and fatigued by the [turbulent nature](#) of the narcissist's life.

Those few still loyal to him, gradually abandon him because they can no longer withstand and tolerate the ups and downs of his career, his moods, his confrontations and conflicts with authority, his chaotic financial state and the dissolution of his emotional affairs. The narcissist is a human roller coaster – fun for a limited time, nauseating in the long run.

This is the process of [narcissistic confinement](#).

Anything which might – however remotely – endanger the availability, or the quantity of the narcissist's Narcissistic Supply is excised. The narcissist avoids certain situations (for instance: where he is likely to encounter opposition, or [criticism](#), or competition). He refrains from certain activities and actions (which are incompatible with his projected [False Self](#)). And he steers clear of people he deems insufficiently amenable to his [charms](#).

To avoid narcissistic injury, the narcissist employs a host of [Emotional Involvement Prevention Measures \(EIPMs\)](#). He becomes rigid, repetitive, predictable, boring, limits himself to "safe subjects" (such as, endlessly, himself) and to "safe conduct", and often rages hysterically (when confronted with unexpected situations or with the slightest resistance to his preconceived course of action).

The narcissist's [rage](#) is not so much a reaction to offended grandiosity as it is the outcome of panic. The narcissist maintains a precarious balance, a mental house of cards, poised on a precipice. His equilibrium is so delicate that anything and anyone can upset it: a casual remark, a [disagreement](#), a slight criticism, a hint, or a fear.

The narcissist magnifies it all into monstrous, ominous, proportions. To avoid these (not so imagined) threats – the narcissist prefers to "[stay at home](#)". He limits his social intercourse. He abstains from daring, trying, or venturing out. He is crippled. This, indeed, is the very essence of the malignancy that is at the heart of narcissism: the fear of flying.

Stephen:

In my life I have developed a moral Teflon (a la President Reagan) that I use when I feel as if some one is trying to get their tender hooks into me the frienemy has a Velcro soul. If this makes me less sympathetic so be it. As my mother used to tell me, 'burn me once fooey on you, burn me twice fooey on me.' A wise woman told me that when we not only see but also start avoiding the manholes in the road of life, then we are wise. Ever so often we have to scrape off the barnacles of frienemies who attach themselves to us. Life is not hermetic, so in the social discourse we give and take, which is normal. But when a vampire tick attaches themselves to you, in whatever form, then you have to be careful. The best way is to apply a lit match to their body and that will make them release their head that is embedded in your skin. Without becoming cynical, I can recognize true friendliness that is not exploitive.

Sam:

Back to pathological narcissism (I am afraid to veer too off course...)

I compare Narcissistic Supply to drugs because of the almost involuntary and always-unrestrained nature of the pursuit involved in securing it. The narcissist is no better or worse (morally speaking) than others. But he lacks the ability to empathise precisely because he is obsessed with the maintenance of his delicate inner balance through the (ever-increasing) consumption of Narcissistic Supply.

The narcissist rates people around him according to whether they can provide him with Narcissistic Supply or not. As far as the narcissist is concerned, those who fail this simple test do not exist. They are two-dimensional cartoon figures. Their feelings, needs and fears are of no interest or importance.

Those identified as potential Sources of Narcissistic Supply are then subjected to a meticulous examination and probing of the volume and quality of the Narcissistic Supply that they are likely to provide. The narcissist nurtures and cultivates these people. He caters to their needs, desires, and wishes. He considers their emotions. He encourages those aspects of their personality that are likely to enhance their ability to provide him with his much needed supply.

In this very restricted sense, he regards and treats them as "human". This is be his way of "maintaining and servicing" his Supply Sources. Needless to say that he loses any and all interest in them and in their needs once he decides that they are no longer able to supply him with what he needs: an audience, attention, and witnessing his accomplishments and moments of glory (to serve as his external memory). The same reaction is provoked by any behaviour judged by the narcissist to be narcissistically injurious.

The narcissist coldly evaluates tragic circumstances. Will they allow him to extract Narcissistic Supply from people affected by the tragedy?

A narcissist, for instance, will give a helping hand, console, guide, and encourage another person only if that person is important, powerful, has access to other important or powerful people, or to the media, or has a following - in other words, only if the bereaved, one recovered, can provide the narcissist with benefits or narcissistic supply.

The same applies if helping, consoling, guiding, or encouraging that person is likely to win the narcissist applause, approval, adoration, a following, or some other kind of Narcissist

Supply from on-lookers and witnesses to the interaction. The act of helping another person must be documented and thus transformed into narcissistic nourishment.

Otherwise the narcissist is not concerned or interested in the problems and suffering of others. The narcissist has no time or energy for anything, except for obtaining next narcissistic fix, ***NO MATTER WHAT THE PRICE AND WHO IS TRAMPLED UPON.***

Stephen:

Sam, I appreciated your comments on evil and morality in your last answer to my letter. Let me reiterate the definition of harm done by downers.

*Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important.
They don't mean to do harm - but the harm does not interest them.
Or they do not see it, or they justify it
Because they are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves.*

By T. S. Eliot

When you wrote, "***Indeed, morality and possessing a moral sense are not possible without empathy!***" I felt we were in synch. Then you wrote:

***"The "Oxford Companion to Philosophy" (Oxford University Press, 1995) defines it thus:
"The suffering which results from morally wrong human choices."***

To qualify as evil a person (Moral Agent) must meet these requirements:

- 1. That he can and does consciously choose between the (morally) right and wrong and constantly and consistently prefers the latter;***
- 2. That he acts on his choice irrespective of the consequences to himself and to others***

Clearly, evil must be premeditated. Francis Hutcheson and Joseph Butler argued that evil is a by-product of the pursuit of one's interest or cause at the expense of other people's interests or causes. But this ignores the critical element of conscious choice among equally efficacious alternatives. Moreover, people often pursue evil even when it jeopardizes their well-being and obstructs their interests. Sadomasochists even relish this orgy of mutual assured destruction."

And you found the The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1999 edition) definition of empathy as:

"The ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions. It is a term coined in the early 20th century, equivalent to the German *Einfühlung* and modeled on "sympathy." The term is used with special (but not exclusive) reference to aesthetic experience. The most obvious example, perhaps, is that of the actor or singer who genuinely feels the part he is performing. With other works of art, a spectator may, by a kind of introjection, feel himself involved in what he observes or contemplates. The use of empathy is an important part of the counseling technique developed by the American psychologist Carl Rogers."

My own experiences

In my class a psychiatrist told us that to treat the mentally ill one has to have compassion. To have compassion you must feel empathy and for those who suffer from personality disorders this is difficult if not impossible because they have to put themselves in another's shoes (theory of mind). A student said he looked at life choices as a balance sheet of good and bad outcomes, where the bottom line influenced the decision-making. I feel that these two views are diametrically opposed. In many cases the financial outcomes may outweigh the moral decisions that we should make as human beings. Slavery was one of the choices made based on economic outcomes, as is our love of the internal combustion engine and resulting pollution. If we take someone and turn him or her into a commodity an object then we no longer have a balanced standard to judge. If the bottom line of a company counts more than the people working in the company, then the stockholders are the winners, and the jobs will go elsewhere. Ultimately the companies will be foreign owned with foreign workers, and the stockholders may lose their controlling interest to foreign stockholders. I wonder if economics has any morality?

The objectification of a person or of a world - put company in their place- has led us to where we are now. When Professor David Suzuki gave a lecture to the intellectual elite of the United States, where I was a bystander, he elucidated the problems facing humankind. He came to the conclusion that the study of the brain and why it makes decisions would be the factor that would save or doom us. If we do not understand the wellspring of our decisions then we are no longer masters of our ship - we are like the captain of the Titanic. Why would the most powerful country in the world, under president Ronald Reagan, embark on a self gutting of resources and embrace some lame brain theory of trickle down economics? The net result of this policy is that there are richer people in the United States, and that most of the manufacturing jobs are being outsourced. The trickle down effect was to encourage third world countries to improve their education and skills, so they could obtain contracts for manufacturing, while the funding for education in the United States has languished. The near sighted and self-serving policies of Republican administrations (as well as Democratic ones) have resulted in a country that is fat and happy and waiting to be butchered by leaner hungrier and smarter wolves. What does this have to do with evil? You may ask.

If we only look at the surface, therefore reacting to perceptions and not to facts, then we will be lured by the Pied Pipers of fast profit, forgetting how the piper was paid in the fairy tale. Evil thinks it can get away with anything. I will give you an example of Evil on a major scale.

In one of my alternative lives, I was a TV news cameraman in Lafayette, Louisiana, learning all about human foibles and follies. Once I was elected - no other camera man wanted the job - to go on a shoot where they had busted a huge swingers club and I looked a table full of photographs of naked bodies in all sorts of positions. People like to document their madness. So it was not a surprise to learn of a murder trial where the victim was not dead. No, she had been awarded a death sentence because she had been infected with HIV and Hepatitis C viruses. She had no idea where or how she was infected other than blaming her former lover, the doctor in question. Now he swore he was blameless. On TV he came across as a well-groomed and manicured physician of the highest repute, married and all. He also struck me as arrogant, lacking compassion. I wonder if those who want to be physicians, or psychiatrists, are sometimes mentally sick and really want to control and hurt other people?

Janice Trahan reported that her ex lover showed up one night to inject her with vitamin B-12. In the court proceedings, the samples of HIV were sent to be analyzed. The genetic imprint

lead to the possible conclusion of deliberate infection, collaborative evidence showed that another one of Dr. Schmidt's patients also had Hepatitis C. The good doctor, in his arrogance, had kept the records for both the HIV and Hepatitis C patients like medical pornography and thus sealed his fate. Phylogenetics saved the day. Here is more:

Evolutionary biology to the rescue: uncovering a physician's biowarfare against his mistress

Molecular epidemiology is the science of figuring out the source of infectious agents by using their DNA (genome) sequences. If you were unlucky enough to get infected with hepatitis B, molecular epidemiology might help you figure out who gave it to you a person with whom you had a sexual encounter? a blood donor? a medical tech? someone else? These methods are often studies in (short-term) evolution, because the DNA sequences of the virus or bacterium infecting you will no longer necessarily be the same as the DNA sequences of the virus in the person who gave it to you. A Darwinian tree showing the relatedness among different viral isolates allows you to make inferences about where your virus came from.

A sensational case of HIV molecular epidemiology led to a criminal case in Lafayette, Louisiana. A physician was accused of injecting his former mistress with blood containing HIV. He had been giving her vitamin B injections (to boost her sex drive), and it was supposedly the final injection in August of 1994 that contained the blood with HIV just before this injection, she had indicated that she was terminating their relationship. When the woman was diagnosed with HIV and hepatitis C in December, 1994, she suspected the physician's injection as the source; at the time of a blood donation in April, 1994, she had been negative for both viruses. This case was unusual in that the person infecting the woman (the physician) was not himself infected, so it was necessary both to locate the patient whose HIV infected the woman and to demonstrate that the physician had access to this patient's blood. Records were discovered in the physician's office indicating that blood had been drawn from two patients during the week in question; one patient was previously known to be HIV+ and the other positive for hepatitis-C. Phylogenetic analyses (Darwinian "trees" of the virus sequences) showed that the HIV sequences of the ex-mistress clustered within those of the patient with HIV, supporting her story (State of Louisiana Criminal Docket # 96CR73313, D. Hillis, personal communication). The physician was convicted of attempted second-degree murder and sentenced to a 50 y term in prison in this first use of phylogenetics in U.S. criminal court.

From:

<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/bio301d/Topics/HIV/Text.html>

The doctor appealed his verdict to the state supreme court and this was the verdict in 30 page pdf file:

<http://web.ask.com/redir?u=http%3a%2f%2fwww.denverda.org%2flegalResource%2fschmidt2000.PDF>

My comments on this

Can we label this as 'evil'? I think most sane people would. In the Bible Luke 2:23 it says, "Doctor, heal thyself." Perhaps we should say to the evil, cure thyself? What if they know not what they do?

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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They do evil and wicked deeds but like the Pharisees, they are think themselves innocent and powerful, sitting in the front pews, like ducks in a row, smug and almighty, fearing no god, or God, then how can we cure them? Are they like Gyroscopes that keep on their paths, never wavering from their truth? How many truths are there, you may well ask? How many people are there on the earth? And in each brain how many different possible truths? An infinite number! How many will come out and claim victory? The loudest one, the one that repeats itself over and over? Certainly the National Socialists took this route, as have many before and after. Keep repeating the same thing and maybe your audience will be broken into believing it, if no other voices speak out. Of course, people will ask uncomfortable questions, maybe these are like Jesus' parables, obscure and difficult to understand. Maybe a question will be like a stone in a shoe, hurting the walker to the point where their gait changes, likewise their thinking? The Irish have a prayer to God that asks Him to punish their enemies, or at least make them limp to identify them.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "What is in a name, that you call evil by another name, would it stink the same?"

That evil exists in our world is a given. That evil men and women are evil is sadly true, but what breaks one's heart is that evil needs a few people who let it go by, ignore it, and refuse to see it or label it as such out of self interest or ignorance. Hitler came to power carried on the shoulders of the German people because he embodied their blood lust and violence as a vengeful hero. Evil needs the company of the fear full masses. Good deeds are done by the solitary brave soul who confronts the dragon. But what if the damsel in distress is in cahoots with the dragon?

As to your comment:

There was one man who dedicated his life, both figuratively and literally, to the study of narcissism as the moral future of mankind. His name was Friedrich Nietzsche.

Friedrich Nietzsche 's uberman of smacks of the NPD, doesn't it? Certainly the National Socialists thought so, they embraced his ideas and see what they did...

Sam:

Is there any necessary connection between our actions and the happiness of others? Disregarding for a moment the murkiness of the definitions of "actions" in philosophical literature - two types of answers were hitherto provided.

Sentient Beings (referred to, in this essay, as "Humans" or "persons") seem either to limit each other - or to enhance each other's actions. Mutual limitation is, for instance, evident in game theory. It deals with decision outcomes when all the rational "players" are fully aware of both the outcomes of their actions and of what they prefer these outcomes to be. They are also fully informed about the other players: they know that they are rational, too, for instance. This, of course, is a very farfetched idealization. A state of unbounded information is nowhere and never to be found. Still, in most cases, the players settle down to one of the Nash equilibria solutions. Their actions are constrained by the existence of the others.

The "Hidden Hand" of Adam Smith (which, among other things, benignly and optimally regulates the market and the price mechanisms) - is also a "mutually limiting" model. Numerous single participants strive to maximize their (economic and financial) outcomes - and end up merely optimizing them. The reason lies in the existence of others within the "market". Again, they are constrained by other people's motivations, priorities and, above all, actions.

All the consequentialist theories of ethics deal with mutual enhancement. This is especially true of the Utilitarian variety. Acts (whether judged individually or in conformity to a set of rules) are moral, if their outcome increases utility (also known as happiness or pleasure). They are morally obligatory if they maximize utility and no alternative course of action can do so. Other versions talk about an "increase" in utility rather than its maximization. Still, the principle is simple: for an act to be judged "moral, ethical, virtuous, or good" - it must influence others in a way which will "enhance" and increase their happiness.

The flaws in all the above answers are evident and have been explored at length in the literature. The assumptions are dubious (fully informed participants, rationality in decision making and in prioritizing the outcomes, etc.). All the answers are instrumental and quantitative: they strive to offer a moral measuring rod. An "increase" entails the measurement of two states: before and after the act. Moreover, it demands full knowledge of the world and a type of knowledge so intimate, so private - that it is not even sure that the players themselves have conscious access to it. Who goes around equipped with an exhaustive list of his priorities and another list of all the possible outcomes of all the acts that he may commit?

But there is another, basic flaw: these answers are descriptive, observational, phenomenological in the restrictive sense of these words. The motives, the drives, the urges, the whole psychological landscape behind the act are deemed irrelevant. The only thing relevant is the increase in utility/happiness. If the latter is achieved - the former might as well

not have existed. A computer, which increases happiness is morally equivalent to a person who achieves a quantitatively similar effect. Even worse: two persons acting out of different motives (one malicious and one benevolent) will be judged to be morally equivalent if their acts were to increase happiness similarly.

But, in life, an increase in utility or happiness or pleasure is **CONDITIONED** upon, is the **RESULT** of the motives behind the acts that led to it. Put differently: the utility functions of two acts depend decisively on the motivation, drive, or urge behind them. The process, which leads to the act is an inseparable part of the act and of its outcomes, including the outcomes in terms of the subsequent increase in utility or happiness. We can safely distinguish the "utility contaminated" act from the "utility pure (or ideal)" act.

If a person does something which is supposed to increase the overall utility - but does so in order to increase his own utility more than the expected average utility increase - the resulting increase will be lower. The maximum utility increase is achieved overall when the actor forgoes all increase in his personal utility. It seems that there is a constant of utility increase and a conservation law pertaining to it. So that a disproportionate increase in one's personal utility translates into a decrease in the overall average utility. It is not a zero sum game because of the infiniteness of the potential increase - but the rules of distribution of the utility added after the act, seem to dictate an averaging of the increase in order to maximize the result.

The same pitfalls await these observations as did the previous ones. The players must be in the possession of full information at least regarding the motivation of the other players. "Why is he doing this?" and "why did he do what he did?" are not questions confined to the criminal courts. We all want to understand the "why's" of actions long before we engage in utilitarian calculations of increased utility. This also seems to be the source of many an emotional reaction concerning human actions. We are envious because we think that the utility increase was unevenly divided (when adjusted for efforts invested and for the prevailing cultural mores). We suspect outcomes that are "too good to be true". Actually, this very sentence proves my point: that even if something produces an increase in overall happiness it will be considered morally dubious if the motivation behind it remains unclear or seems to be irrational or culturally deviant.

Two types of information are, therefore, always needed: one (discussed above) concerns the motives of the main protagonists, the act-ors. The second type relates to the world. Full knowledge about the world is also a necessity: the causal chains (actions lead to outcomes), what increases the overall utility or happiness and for whom, etc. To assume that all the participants in an interaction possess this tremendous amount of information is an idealization (used also in modern theories of economy), should be regarded as such and not be confused with reality in which people approximate, estimate, extrapolate and evaluate based on a much more limited knowledge.

Two examples come to mind:

Aristotle described the "Great Soul". It is a virtuous agent (actor, player) that judges himself to be possessed of a great soul (in a self-referential evaluative disposition). He has the right measure of his worth and he courts the appreciation of his peers (but not of his inferiors) which he believes that he deserves by virtue of being virtuous. He has a dignity of demeanour, which is also very self-conscious. He is, in short, magnanimous (for instance, he

forgives his enemies their offences). He seems to be the classical case of a happiness-increasing agent - but he is not. And the reason that he fails in qualifying as such is that his motives are suspect. Does he refrain from assaulting his enemies because of charity and generosity of spirit - or because it is likely to dent his pomposity? It is sufficient that a POSSIBLE different motive exist - to ruin the utilitarian outcome.

Adam Smith, on the other hand, adopted the spectator theory of his teacher Francis Hutcheson. The morally good is a euphemism. It is really the name provided to the pleasure, which a spectator derives from seeing a virtue in action. Smith added that the reason for this emotion is the similarity between the virtue observed in the agent and the virtue possessed by the observer. It is of a moral nature because of the object involved: the agent tries to consciously conform to standards of behaviour which will not harm the innocent, while, simultaneously benefiting himself, his family and his friends. This, in turn, will benefit society as a whole. Such a person is likely to be grateful to his benefactors and sustain the chain of virtue by reciprocating. The chain of good will, thus, endlessly multiply.

(continued below)

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Even here, we see that the question of motive and psychology is of utmost importance. WHY is the agent doing what he is doing? Does he really conform to society's standards INTERNALLY? Is he GRATEFUL to his benefactors? Does he WISH to benefit his friends? These are all questions answerable only in the realm of the mind. Really, they are not answerable at all.

Back to friendship:

What are friends for and how can a friendship be tested? By behaving altruistically, would be the most common answer and by sacrificing one's interests in favour of one's friends. Friendship implies the converse of egoism, both psychologically and ethically. But then we say that the dog is "man's best friend". After all, it is characterized by unconditional love, by unselfish behaviour, by sacrifice, when necessary. Isn't this the epitome of friendship? Apparently not. On the one hand, the dog's friendship seems to be unaffected by long term calculations of personal benefit. But that is not to say that it is not affected by calculations of

a short-term nature. The owner, after all, looks after the dog and is the source of its subsistence and security. People – and dogs – have been known to have sacrificed their lives for less. The dog is selfish – it clings and protects what it regards to be its territory and its property (including – and especially so - the owner). Thus, the first condition, seemingly not satisfied by canine attachment is that it be reasonably unselfish.

There are, however, more important conditions:

- a. For a real friendship to exist – at least one of the friends must be a conscious and intelligent entity, possessed of mental states. It can be an individual, or a collective of individuals, but in both cases this requirement will similarly apply.
- b. There must be a minimal level of identical mental states between the terms of the equation of friendship. A human being cannot be friends with a tree (at least not in the fullest sense of the word).
- c. The behaviour must not be deterministic, lest it be interpreted as instinct driven. A conscious choice must be involved. This is a very surprising conclusion: the more "reliable", the more "predictable" – the less appreciated. Someone who reacts identically to similar situations, without dedicating a first, let alone a second thought to it – his acts would be depreciated as "automatic responses".

For a pattern of behaviour to be described as "friendship", these four conditions must be met: diminished egoism, conscious and intelligent agents, identical mental states (allowing for the communication of the friendship) and non-deterministic behaviour, the result of constant decision making.

A friendship can be – and often is – tested in view of these criteria. There is a paradox underlying the very notion of testing a friendship. A real friend would never test his friend's commitment and allegiance. Anyone who puts his friend to a test (deliberately) would hardly qualify as a friend himself. But circumstances can put ALL the members of a friendship, all the individuals (two or more) in the "collective" to a test of friendship. Financial hardship encountered by someone would surely oblige his friends to assist him – even if he himself did not take the initiative and explicitly asked them to do so. It is life that tests the resilience and strength and depth of true friendships – not the friends themselves.

In all the discussions of egoism versus altruism – confusion between self-interest and self-welfare prevails. A person may be urged on to act by his self-interest, which might be detrimental to his (long-term) self-welfare. Some behaviours and actions can satisfy short-term desires, urges, wishes (in short: self-interest) – and yet be self-destructive or otherwise adversely effect the individual's future welfare. (Psychological) Egoism should, therefore, be re-defined as the active pursuit of self-welfare, not of self-interest. Only when the person caters, in a balanced manner, to both his present (self-interest) and his future (self-welfare) interests – can we call him an egoist. Otherwise, if he caters only to his immediate self-interest, seeks to fulfil his desires and disregards the future costs of his behaviour – he is an animal, not an egoist.

Joseph Butler separated the main (motivating) desire from the desire that is self-interest. The latter cannot exist without the former. A person is hungry and this is his desire. His self-interest is, therefore, to eat. But the hunger is directed at eating – not at fulfilling self-

interests. Thus, hunger generates self-interest (to eat) but its object is eating. Self-interest is a second order desire that aims to satisfy first order desires (which can also motivate us directly).

This subtle distinction can be applied to disinterested behaviours, acts, which seem to lack a clear self-interest or even a first order desire. Consider why do people contribute to humanitarian causes? There is no self-interest here, even if we account for the global picture (with every possible future event in the life of the contributor). No rich American is likely to find himself starving in Somalia, the target of one such humanitarian aid mission.

But even here the Butler model can be validated. The first order desire of the donator is to avoid anxiety feelings generated by a cognitive dissonance. In the process of socialization we are all exposed to altruistic messages. They are internalized by us (some even to the extent of forming part of the almighty superego, the conscience). In parallel, we assimilate the punishment inflicted upon members of society who are not "social" enough, unwilling to contribute beyond that which is required to satisfy their self interest, selfish or egoistic, non-conformist, "too" individualistic, "too" idiosyncratic or eccentric, etc. Completely not being altruistic is "bad" and as such calls for "punishment". This no longer is an outside judgement, on a case by case basis, with the penalty inflicted by an external moral authority. This comes from the inside: the opprobrium and reproach, the guilt, the punishment (read Kafka). Such impending punishment generates anxiety whenever the person judges himself not to have been altruistically "sufficient". It is to avoid this anxiety or to quell it that a person engages in altruistic acts, the result of his social conditioning. To use the Butler scheme: the first-degree desire is to avoid the agonies of cognitive dissonance and the resulting anxiety. This can be achieved by committing acts of altruism. The second-degree desire is the self-interest to commit altruistic acts in order to satisfy the first-degree desire. No one engages in contributing to the poor because he wants them to be less poor or in famine relief because he does not want others to starve. People do these apparently selfless activities because they do not want to experience that tormenting inner voice and to suffer the acute anxiety, which accompanies it. Altruism is the name that we give to successful indoctrination. The stronger the process of socialization, the stricter the education, the more severely brought up the individual, the grimmer and more constraining his superego – the more of an altruist he is likely to be. Independent people who really feel comfortable with their selves are less likely to exhibit these behaviours.

This is the self-interest of society: altruism enhances the overall level of welfare. It redistributes resources more equitably, it tackles market failures more or less efficiently (progressive tax systems are altruistic), it reduces social pressures and stabilizes both individuals and society. Clearly, the self-interest of society is to make its members limit the pursuit of their own self-interest? There are many opinions and theories. They can be grouped into:

- a. Those who see an inverse relation between the two: the more satisfied the self interests of the individuals comprising a society – the worse off that society will end up. What is meant by "better off" is a different issue but at least the commonsense, intuitive, meaning is clear and begs no explanation. Many religions and strands of moral absolutism espouse this view.
- b. Those who believe that the more satisfied the self-interests of the individuals comprising a society – the better off this society will end up. These are the "hidden

hand" theories. Individuals, which strive merely to maximize their utility, their happiness, their returns (profits) – find themselves inadvertently engaged in a colossal endeavour to better their society. This is mostly achieved through the dual mechanisms of market and price. Adam Smith is an example (and other schools of the dismal science).

- c. Those who believe that a delicate balance must exist between the two types of self-interest: the private and the public. While most individuals will be unable to obtain the full satisfaction of their self-interest – it is still conceivable that they will attain most of it. On the other hand, society must not fully tread on individuals' rights to self-fulfilment, wealth accumulation and the pursuit of happiness. So, it must accept less than maximum satisfaction of its self-interest. The optimal mix exists and is, probably, of the minimax type. This is not a zero sum game and society and the individuals comprising it can maximize their worst outcomes.

The French have a saying: "Good bookkeeping – makes for a good friendship". Self-interest, altruism and the interest of society at large are not necessarily incompatible.

Wednesday, March 9 2005, Letter Twelve to [Sam Vaknin](#) from [Stephen McDonnell](#)

The foolish pursuit of beauty

Dear Sam

In [letter no 3](#) , I wrote of Miss X who might well fill the definition of frienemy. Frienemy was coined by the characters of the TV show Sex in the City, about women in Manhattan and their ups and downs with friends and lovers. Over the years I have seen the ravages such frienemies wreak on people. They are hypocrites, and liars, but for a good cause they insist they have your best interest at heart.

As an aside, I think I make a good foil for your thoughts. I ran across a piece of wisdom - literally a piece of paper I found in the street as I walked my dog - by Eugene Ionesco that goes, "It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question." So let me change the subject from evil to beauty.

Over the years it struck me that certain people are obsessed with 'beauty'. They want to be beautiful, and they want to live in a beautiful world, where there is no 'ugliness'. I confess to being vain, but my tastes are not always the best. I remember a Hound's-tooth pattern pair of pants I loved, that on hindsight were horrible. But then everyone's tastes vary. Miss X, whom I mentioned, used to tell me what was in and out. She had a very good sense of coolness. Something that is a la mode, is not always beautiful, and maybe that is where we should start a discussion. I believe NPDs have a fine sense of what is attractive, both physically and intellectually. They know that a web site that is high in the rankings usually gets more attention than the small one that may have more information but is not 'recognized'. They know that breast implants or a full head of hair will attract the opposite sex. They know that humans are attracted to beauty.

When does vanity become narcissism?

[The legend](#) of the most beautiful boy, Narcissus, is a lesson taught to those who foolishly believe in beauty as an end all and a be all. The beautiful Narcissus attracted the admiration and love of both men and women. When a wood nymph fell in love with him, he ignored her and she pined away. The god of vengeance, Nemesis, resurrected her as Echo who could only repeat what she saw and heard. Sounds like many who run after beauty. Nemesis punished Narcissus for his hubris by having him look into a pool of water and falling in love with that image.

If we look around us in magazines, newspapers, and [films](#) and on [television](#) we are bombarded by images of beautiful people, people who want to be looked at and admired simply because of their outer surface. Some of them even make pornographic videos of themselves so that even more people will want to look at them. None of them have done anything to improve humankind's sort, they simply exist to be admired and even worshiped like our friend the Narcissist.

Christopher Lasch has pointed out that we live in a Narcissistic age, where image is more important than substance. Beauty is a wonderful concept, but what is beautiful varies from culture to culture. As the saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder because real beauty does not need another to exist, and one man's meat may be another man's poison. Tastes vary. Canons of beauty vary from year to year. Like fashion, what is in this year will be out next year. Yet we continue to look for beauty, both in humans and in nature.

I believe that when one sees beauty, it is like a bowl movement, something that is natural and pleasurable, and that sometimes stinks. Beauty provokes an emotion. For a narcissist, this emotion is more important than anything. Because he or she sees how beauty can capture people. In studies of monkeys, they were given the choice between food and looking at pictures of [high status monkeys](#) in their troupe they often preferred looking at the pictures. Beauty and status are linked in some way in our simian minds. It can be assumed that looking better would benefit them in the long run, as they would receive more attention and food.

There is a sexual attraction to beauty as well. Most young men and women pass through a blossoming stage when they are beautiful, attractive and naïve and the center of attention. They also go crazy for an image, a rock idol or one of their professors. The need for a beautiful image takes over their reasoning the sexual drive and the wish for power are intertwined. Most of us pass out of that stage, if we are lucky, but the narcissist loves the attention, so wants to continue to seek this state of bliss. They want to be the center of attention and they act like beauty queens, strutting and posing. Those youths who do not blossom take refuge in intellectual pursuits or in crime; both of these avenues can also attract attention. Good looks and grooming in the Ape world helps in the art of mating; it shows that you are both healthy and have good genetic material.

The pursuit of absolute beauty is a human endeavor (despite some examples of animal artists) that has no real reason to exist. Some people devote their whole lives to beauty, either creating it or criticizing those who create. Are artists like the Bowerbird, building a structure that attracts attention and mates? Is this the purpose of beauty? Is it vainglorious?

Sam:

Tempted as I am to discuss the philosophy of aesthetics, I want to refocus the discussion on [pathological narcissism](#). I described my perceptions, as a diagnosed narcissist, of beauty - and especially of the bodily variety - in these pieces:

[*Narcissist, the Machine \(The Narcissist's Self-Image\)*](#)

[*Physique Dysmorphique \(Narcissism and Body Dysmorphic Disorders\)*](#)

[*Studying my Death \(Narcissism and Mortality\)*](#)

I think that a simple rule of thumb will do:

To admire beauty is not narcissistic. To admire one's own beauty is. This is why I suggested the typology of somatic vs. cerebral narcissists.

Narcissists are either cerebral or somatic. In other words, they either generate their Narcissistic Supply by applying their bodies or by applying their minds.

The somatic narcissist flaunts his sexual conquests, parades his possessions, exhibits his muscles, brags about his physical aesthetics or sexual prowess or exploits, is often a health freak and a hypochondriac. The cerebral narcissist is a know-it-all, haughty and intelligent "computer". He uses his awesome intellect, or knowledge (real or pretended) to secure adoration, adulation and admiration. To him, his body and its maintenance are a burden and a distraction.

Both types are auto-erotic (psychosexually in love with themselves, with their bodies and with their brain). Both types prefer masturbation to adult, mature, interactive, multi-dimensional and emotion-laden sex.

The cerebral narcissist is often celibate (even when he has a girlfriend or a spouse). He prefers pornography and sexual auto-stimulation to the real thing. The cerebral narcissist is sometimes a latent (hidden, not yet outed) homosexual.

(continued below)

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The somatic narcissist uses other people's bodies to masturbate. Sex with him - pyrotechnics and acrobatics aside - is likely to be an impersonal and emotionally alienating and draining experience. The partner is often treated as an object, an extension of the somatic narcissist, a toy, a warm and pulsating vibrator.

It is a mistake to assume type-constancy. In other words, all narcissists are BOTH cerebral and somatic. In each narcissist, one of the types is dominant. So, the narcissist is either OVERWHELMINGLY cerebral - or DOMINANTLY somatic. But the other type, the recessive (manifested less frequently) type, is there. It is lurking, waiting to erupt.

The narcissist swings between his dominant type and his recessive type. The latter is expressed mainly as a result of a major narcissistic injury or life crisis.

Sex for the narcissist is an instrument designed to increase the number of Sources of Narcissistic Supply. If it happens to be the most efficient weapon in the narcissist's arsenal – he makes profligate use of it. In other words: if the narcissist cannot obtain adoration, admiration, approval, applause, or any other kind of attention by other means (e.g., intellectually) – he resorts to sex.

He then become a satyr (or a nymphomaniac): indiscriminately engages in sex with multiple partners. His sex partners are considered by him to be objects - sources of Narcissistic Supply. It is through the processes of successful seduction and sexual conquest that the narcissist derives his badly needed narcissistic "fix".

The narcissist is likely to perfect his techniques of courting and regard his sexual exploits as a form of art. He usually exposes this side of him – in great detail – to others, to an audience, expecting to win their approval and admiration. Because the Narcissistic Supply in his case is in the very act of conquest and (what he perceives to be) subordination – the narcissist is forced to hop from one partner to another.

Some narcissists prefer "complicated" situations. If men – they prefer virgins, married women, frigid or lesbian women, etc. The more "difficult" the target – the more rewarding the narcissistic outcome. Such a narcissist may be married, but he does not regard his extra-marital affairs as either immoral or a breach of any explicit or implicit contract between him and his spouse.

He keeps explaining to anyone who cares to listen that his other sexual partners are nothing to him, meaningless, that he is merely taking advantage of them and that they do not constitute a threat and should not be taken seriously by his spouse. In his mind a clear separation exists between the honest "woman of his life" (really, a saint) and the whores that he is having sex with.

With the exception of the meaningful women in his life, he tends to view all females in a bad light. His behaviour, thus, achieves a dual purpose: securing Narcissistic Supply, on the one hand – and re-enacting old, unresolved conflicts and traumas (abandonment by Primary Objects and the Oedipal conflict, for instance).

When inevitably abandoned by his spouse – the narcissist is veritably shocked and hurt. This is the sort of crisis, which might drive him to psychotherapy. Still, deep inside, he feels compelled to continue to pursue precisely the same path. His abandonment is cathartic, purifying. Following a period of deep depression and suicidal ideation – the narcissist is likely to feel cleansed, invigorated, unshackled, ready for the next round of hunting.

But there is another type of narcissist. He also has bouts of sexual hyperactivity in which he trades sexual partners and tends to regard them as objects. However, with him, this is a secondary behaviour. It appears mainly after major narcissistic traumas and crises.

A painful divorce, a devastating personal financial upheaval – and this type of narcissist adopts the view that the "old" (intellectual) solutions do not work anymore. He frantically gropes and searches for new ways to attract attention, to restore his False Ego (=his grandiosity) and to secure a subsistence level of Narcissistic Supply.

Sex is handy and is a great source of the right kind of supply: it is immediate, sexual partners are interchangeable, the solution is comprehensive (it encompasses all the aspects of the narcissist's being), natural, highly charged, adventurous, and pleasurable. Thus, following a life crisis, the cerebral narcissist is likely to be deeply involved in sexual activities – very frequently and almost to the exclusion of all other matters.

However, as the memories of the crisis fade, as the narcissistic wounds heal, as the Narcissistic Cycle re-commences and the balance is restored – this second type of narcissist reveals his true colours. He abruptly loses interest in sex and in all his sexual partners. The frequency of his sexual activities deteriorates from a few times a day – to a few times a year. He reverts to intellectual pursuits, sports, politics, voluntary activities – anything but sex.

This kind of narcissist is afraid of encounters with the opposite sex and is even more afraid of emotional involvement or commitment that he fancies himself prone to develop following a sexual encounter. In general, such a narcissist withdraws not only sexually – but also emotionally. If married – he loses all overt interest in his spouse, sexual or otherwise. He confines himself to his world and makes sure that he is sufficiently busy to preclude any interaction with his nearest (and supposedly dearest).

He becomes completely immersed in "big projects", lifelong plans, a vision, or a cause – all very rewarding narcissistically and all very demanding and time consuming. In such circumstances, sex inevitably becomes an obligation, a necessity, or a maintenance chore reluctantly undertaken to preserve his sources of supply (his family or household).

The cerebral narcissist does not enjoy sex and by far prefers masturbation or "objective", emotionless sex, like going to prostitutes. Actually, he uses his mate or spouse as an "alibi", a shield against the attentions of other women, an insurance policy which preserves his virile image while making it socially and morally commendable for him to avoid any intimate or sexual contact with others.

Ostentatiously ignoring women other than his wife (a form of aggression) he feels righteous in saying: "I am a faithful husband". At the same time, he feels hostility towards his spouse for ostensibly preventing him from freely expressing his sexuality, for isolating him from carnal pleasures.

The narcissist's thwarted logic goes something like this: "I am married/attached to this woman. Therefore, I am not allowed to be in any form of contact with other women which might be interpreted as more than casual or businesslike. This is why I refrain from having anything to do with women – because I am being faithful, as opposed to most other immoral men.

However, I do not like this situation. I envy my free peers. They can have as much sex and romance as they want to – while I am confined to this marriage, chained by my wife, my freedom curbed. I am angry at her and I will punish her by abstaining from having sex with her."

Thus frustrated, the narcissist minimises all manner of intercourse with his close circle (spouse, children, parents, siblings, very intimate friends): sexual, verbal, or emotional. He limits himself to the rawest exchanges of information and isolates himself socially.

His reclusion insures against a future hurt and avoids the intimacy that he so dreads. But, again, this way he also secures abandonment and the replay of old, unresolved, conflicts. Finally, he really is left alone by everyone, with no Secondary Sources of Supply.

In his quest to find new sources, he again embarks on ego-mending bouts of sex, followed by the selection of a spouse or a mate (a Secondary Narcissistic Supply Source). Then the cycle re-commence: a sharp drop in sexual activity, emotional absence and cruel detachment leading to abandonment.

The second type of narcissist is mostly sexually loyal to his spouse. He alternates between what appears to be hyper-sexuality and asexuality (really, forcefully repressed sexuality). In the second phase, he feels no sexual urges, bar the most basic. He is, therefore, not compelled to "cheat" upon his mate, betray her, or violate the marital vows. He is much more interested in preventing a worrisome dwindling of the kind of Narcissistic Supply that really matters. Sex, he says to himself, contentedly, is for those who can do no better.

Somatic narcissists tend to verbal exhibitionism. They tend to brag in graphic details about their conquests and exploits. In extreme cases, they might introduce "live witnesses" and revert to total, classical exhibitionism. This sits well with their tendency to "objectify" their sexual partners, to engage in emotionally-neutral sex (group sex, for instance) and to indulge in autoerotic sex.

The exhibitionist sees himself reflected in the eyes of the beholders. This constitutes the main sexual stimulus, this is what turns him on. This outside "look" is also what defines the narcissist. There is bound to be a connection. One (the exhibitionist) may be the culmination, the "pure case" of the other (the narcissist).

Stephen:

Are narcissists homosexual by nature?

The Irish philosopher John O'Donahue author of the best seller *Anam Cara* has written another book entitled *Beauty*, and in it he posits that beauty is the cure to everything. Ah, if only this was true those who would agree with him believe in perfection. They do not want a fly in their soup. Years ago I met a young French man of noble birth who was also

homosexual. As we walked the boulevards of Paris, full of interesting people, he told me that he found them all ugly. For him only someone who looked like him, and shared his sexual desires, was beautiful. No wonder Freud connected the love of oneself embodied in narcissism to homosexuality!

The drive of a narcissist seems to be toward finding someone just like them; they are seeking the image that they created, the clone of themselves, their alter ego, and the virtual image in the mirror. Most narcissists see their outside image as the having the same sex as themselves. This other, has stepped out of their body and wonders around doing and saying things. Within the hollow darkness of their souls sits another entity that is a shriveled person that never developed beyond childhood. I suspect that thing looks like one of the children suffering from early aging. No wonder they look for beauty, because they hate themselves. I am conjecturing here, and only Sam can tell me if I am wrong.

Where does the pursuit of beauty take the NPD? When Hitler visited Rome, Mussolini - the inventor of fascism had false house fronts put up, hiding the ugliness that he despised. (Vladimir Putin did the same thing during the St Petersburg anniversary celebrations.) Italians are particularly attuned to how things look; is this one of the wellsprings of fascism? Hypocrisy taken to its fullest expression? Hitler and his gang hated the looks of Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals. They were vermin that mired the Nazi idea of a beautiful perfect society. Maybe this is why I cringe when I hear someone talking about beauty in a certain way; I wonder if they want perfection rather than reality. An I suspect that their dreams will become our nightmares!

(continued below)

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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Reading a book by a famous landscape artist, I ran across a funny story. He liked to wander the countryside looking for 'picturesque' scenes to draw and paint. He found a barn full of junk and very dilapidated, and he asked the farmer if he could do a painting of it. When he returned a week later he found that the farmer had cleaned out everything and painted it bright red, destroying the beauty the painter found appealing. One man's meat is another man's masterpiece.

In conclusion, I think that beauty can be found everywhere. Those who try to capture it and exclude everything else are blind to real beauty. Narcissists want to impose their concepts and ideas of beauty on others. Most of the foolish chasers of beauty are dangerous because they believe their opinions are sacrosanct. They are not really lovers of beauty, but of their own tastes in beauty, and that is a dangerous thing. Like Martha Stewart, a paragon of taste, they dictate beauty and so crush anything that they find ugly. Remember the story of Cinderella!

Sam:

I am a heterosexual and thus deprived of an intimate acquaintance with certain psychological processes, which allegedly are unique to homosexuals. I find it hard to believe that there are such processes, to begin with. [Research failed to find](#) any substantive difference between the psychological make-up of a narcissist who happens to have homosexual preferences – and a heterosexual narcissist.

They both are predators, devouring Narcissistic Supply Sources as they go. Narcissists look for new victims, the way tigers look for prey – they are hungry. Hungry for adoration, admiration, acceptance, approval, and any other kind of attention. Old sources die easy – once taken for granted, the narcissistic element of conquest vanishes.

Conquest is important because it proves the superiority of the narcissist. The very act of subduing, subjugating, or acquiring the power to influence someone provides the narcissist with Narcissistic Supply. The newly conquered idolise the narcissist and serve as trophies.

The act of conquering and subordinating is epitomized by the sexual encounter - an objective and atavistic interaction. Making love to someone means that the consenting partner finds the narcissist (or one or more of his traits, such as his intelligence, his physique, even his money) irresistible.

The distinction between passive and active sexual partners is mechanical, false, superfluous and superficial. Penetration does not make one of the parties "the stronger one". To cause someone to have sex with you is a powerful stimulus – and always provokes a sensation of omnipotence. Whether one is physically passive or active – one is always psychosexually active.

Anyone who has unsafe sex is gambling with his life – though the odds are much smaller than public hysteria would have us believe. Reality does not matter, though – it is the perception of reality that matters. Getting this close to (perceived) danger is the equivalent of engaging in self-destruction (suicide). Narcissists are, at times, suicidal and are always [self-destructive](#).

There is, however, one element, which might be unique to homosexuals: the fact that their self-definition hinges on their sexual identity. I know of no heterosexual who would use his sexual preferences to define himself almost fully. Homosexuality has been inflated to the level of a sub-culture, a separate psychology, or a myth. This is typical of persecuted minorities. However, it does have an influence on the individual. Preoccupation with body and sex makes most homosexual narcissists ***SOMATIC*** narcissists.

Moreover, the homosexual makes love to a person of the **SAME** sex – in a way, to his **REFLECTION**. In this respect, homosexual relations are highly narcissistic and autoerotic affairs.

The somatic narcissist directs his libido at his body (as opposed to the cerebral narcissist, who concentrates upon his intellect). He cultivates it, nourishes and nurtures it, is often an hypochondriac, dedicates an inordinate amount of time to its needs (real and imaginary). It is through his body that this type of narcissist tracks down and captures his Supply Sources.

The supply that the somatic narcissist so badly requires is derived from his form, his shape, his build, his profile, his beauty, his physical attractiveness, his health, his age. He downplays Narcissistic Supply directed at other traits. He uses sex to reaffirm his prowess, his attractiveness, or his youth. Love, to him, is synonymous with sex and he focuses his learning skills on the sexual act, the foreplay and the coital aftermath.

Seduction becomes addictive because it leads to a quick succession of Supply Sources. Naturally, boredom (a form of transmuted aggression) sets in once the going gets routine. [Routine is counter-narcissistic](#) by definition because it threatens the narcissist's sense of [uniqueness](#).

An interesting side issue relates to transsexuals.

Philosophically, there is little difference between a narcissist who seeks to avoid his True Self (and positively to become his False Self) – and a transsexual who seeks to discard his true gender. But this similarity, though superficially appealing, is questionable.

People sometimes seek sex reassignment because of advantages and opportunities which, they believe, are enjoyed by the other sex. This rather unrealistic (fantastic) view of the other is faintly narcissistic. It includes elements of idealised over-valuation, of self-preoccupation, and of objectification of one's self. It demonstrates a deficient ability to empathise and some grandiose sense of entitlement ("I deserve to be taken care of") and omnipotence ("I can be whatever I want to be – despite nature/God").

This feeling of entitlement is especially manifest in some gender dysphoric individuals who aggressively pursue hormonal or surgical treatment. They feel that it is their inalienable right to receive it on demand and without any strictures or restrictions. For instance, they oftentimes refuse to undergo psychological evaluation or treatment as a condition for the hormonal or surgical treatment.

It is interesting to note that both narcissism and gender dysphoria are early childhood phenomena. This could be explained by problematic Primary Objects, dysfunctional families, or a common genetic or biochemical problem. It is too early to say which. As yet, there isn't even an agreed typology of gender identity disorders – let alone an in-depth comprehension of their sources.

A radical view, proffered by Ray Blanchard, seems to indicate that pathological narcissism is more likely to be found among non-core, ego-dystonic, autogynephilic transsexuals and among heterosexual transvestites. It is less manifest in core, ego-syntonic, homosexual transsexuals.

Autogynephilic transsexuals are subject to an intense urge to become the opposite sex and, thus, to be rendered the sexual object of their own desire. In other words, they are so sexually attracted to themselves that they wish to become both lovers in the romantic equation - the male and the female. It is the fulfilment of the ultimate narcissistic fantasy with the False Self as a fetish ("narcissistic fetish").

Autogynephilic transsexuals start off as heterosexuals and end up as either bisexual or homosexual. By shifting his/her attentions to men, the male autogynephilic transsexual "proves" to himself that he has finally become a "true" and desirable woman.

To your other observations:

Fromm "diagnosed" both Hitler and Stalin as narcissists. As Saul Friedlander noted, both Fascism and Nazism were aesthetic movements (one of them founded by an ["artist"](#)).

But this was old hat! Hitler and Nazism are often wrongly portrayed as an apocalyptic and seismic break with European history. Yet the truth is that they were the culmination and reification of European history in the 19th century. Europe's annals of colonialism have prepared it for the range of phenomena associated with the Nazi regime - from industrial murder to racial theories, from slave labour to the forcible annexation of territory.

Germany was a colonial power no different to murderous Belgium or Britain. What set it apart is that it directed its colonial attentions at the heartland of Europe - rather than at Africa or Asia. Both World Wars were colonial wars fought on European soil. Moreover, Nazi Germany innovated by applying prevailing racial theories (usually reserved to non-whites) to the white race itself. It started with the Jews - a non-controversial proposition - but then expanded them to include "east European" whites, such as the Poles and the Russians.

Germany was not alone in its malignant nationalism. The far right in France was as pernicious. Nazism - and Fascism - were world ideologies, adopted enthusiastically in places as diverse as Iraq, Egypt, Norway, Latin America, and Britain. At the end of the 1930's, liberal capitalism, communism, and fascism (and its mutations) were locked in mortal battle of ideologies. Hitler's mistake was to delusionally believe in the affinity between capitalism and Nazism - an affinity enhanced, to his mind, by Germany's corporatism and by the existence of a common enemy: global communism.

(continued below)

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Colonialism always had discernible religious overtones and often collaborated with missionary religion. "The White Man's burden" of civilizing the "savages" was widely perceived as ordained by God. The church was the extension of the colonial power's army and trading companies.

It is no wonder that Hitler's lebensraum colonial movement - Nazism - possessed all the hallmarks of an institutional religion: priesthood, rites, rituals, temples, worship, catechism, mythology. Hitler was this religion's ascetic saint. He monastically denied himself earthly pleasures (or so he claimed) in order to be able to dedicate himself fully to his calling. Hitler was a monstrously inverted Jesus, sacrificing his life and denying himself so that (Aryan) humanity should benefit. By surpassing and suppressing his humanity, Hitler became a distorted version of [Nietzsche's "superman"](#).

But being a-human or super-human also means being a-sexual and a-moral. In this restricted sense, Hitler was a post-modernist and a moral relativist. He projected to the masses an androgynous figure and enhanced it by fostering the adoration of nudity and all things "natural". But what Nazism referred to as "nature" was not natural at all.

It was an aesthetic of decadence and evil (though it was not perceived this way by the Nazis), carefully orchestrated, and artificial. Nazism was about reproduced copies, not about originals. It was about the manipulation of symbols - not about veritable atavism.

In short: Nazism was about theatre, not about life. To enjoy the spectacle (and be subsumed by it), Nazism demanded the suspension of judgment, depersonalization, and de-realization. Catharsis was tantamount, in Nazi dramaturgy, to self-annulment. Nazism was nihilistic not only operationally, or ideologically. Its very language and narratives were nihilistic. Nazism was conspicuous nihilism - and Hitler served as a role model, annihilating Hitler the Man, only to re-appear as Hitler the stychia.

What was the role of the Jews in all this?

Nazism posed as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the superpowers, the European order. The Nazis borrowed the Leninist vocabulary and assimilated it effectively. Hitler and the Nazis were an adolescent movement, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state. Hitler himself was a [malignant narcissist](#), as Fromm correctly noted.

The Jews constituted a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that was "wrong" with Europe. They were an old nation, they were eerily disembodied (without a territory), they were cosmopolitan, they were part of the establishment, they were "decadent", they were hated on religious and socio-economic grounds (see Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners"), they were different, they were narcissistic (felt and acted as morally superior), they were everywhere, they were defenseless, they were credulous, they were

adaptable (and thus could be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They were the perfect hated father figure and parricide was in fashion.

This is precisely the source of the fascination with Hitler. He was an inverted human. His unconscious was his conscious. He acted out our most repressed drives, fantasies, and wishes. He provides us with a glimpse of the horrors that lie beneath the veneer, the barbarians at our personal gates, and what it was like before we invented civilization. Hitler forced us all through a time warp and many did not emerge. He was not the devil. He was one of us. He was what Arendt aptly called the banality of evil. Just an ordinary, mentally disturbed, failure, a member of a mentally disturbed and failing nation, who lived through disturbed and failing times. He was the perfect mirror, a channel, a voice, and the very depth of our souls.

Nazism - and, by extension, fascism (though the two are by no means identical) - amounted to permanent revolutionary civil wars. Fascist movements were founded, inter alia, on negations and on the militarization of politics. Their raison d'être and vigor were derived from their rabid opposition to liberalism, communism, conservatism, rationalism, and individualism and from exclusionary racism. It was a symbiotic relationship - self-definition and continued survival by opposition.

Yet, all fascist movements suffered from fatal - though largely preconcerted - ideological tensions. In their drive to become broad, pluralistic, churches (a hallmark of totalitarian movements) - these secular religions often offered contradictory doctrinal fare.

I. Renewal vs. Destruction

The first axis of tension was between renewal and destruction. Fascist parties invariably presented themselves as concerned with the pursuit and realization of a utopian program based on the emergence of a "new man" (in Germany it was a mutation of [Nietzsche's Superman](#)). "New", "young", "vital", and "ideal" were pivotal keywords. Destruction was both inevitable (i.e., the removal of the old and corrupt) and desirable (i.e., cathartic, purifying, unifying, and ennobling).

Yet fascism was also nihilistic. It was bipolar: either utopia or death. Hitler instructed Speer to demolish Germany when his dream of a thousand-years Reich crumbled. This mental splitting mechanism (all bad or all good, black or white) is typical of all utopian movements. Similarly, Stalin (not a fascist) embarked on orgies of death and devastation every time he faced an obstacle.

This ever-present tension between construction, renewal, vitalism, and the adoration of nature - and destruction, annihilation, murder, and chaos - was detrimental to the longevity and cohesion of fascist fronts.

II. Individualism vs. Collectivism

A second, more all-pervasive, tension was between self-assertion and what Griffin and Payne call "self transcendence". Fascism was a cult of the Promethean will, of the super-man, above morality, and the shackles of the pernicious materialism, egalitarianism, and rationalism. It was demanded of the New Man to be willful, assertive, determined, self-motivating, a law unto himself. The New Man, in other words, was supposed to be contemptuously a-social (though not anti-social).

But here, precisely, arose the contradiction. It was society which demanded from the New Man certain traits and the selfless fulfillment of certain obligations and observance of certain duties. The New Man was supposed to transcend egotism and sacrifice himself for the greater, collective, good. In Germany, it was Hitler who embodied this intolerable inconsistency. On the one hand, he was considered to be the reification of the will of the nation and its destiny. On the other hand, he was described as self-denying, self-less, inhumanly altruistic, and a temporal saint martyred on the altar of the German nation.

This doctrinal tension manifested itself also in the economic ideology of fascist movements.

Fascism was often corporatist or syndicalist (and always collectivist). At times, it sounded suspiciously like Leninism-Stalinism. Payne has this to say:

"What fascist movements had in common was the aim of a new functional relationship for the functional and economic systems, eliminating the autonomy (or, in some proposals, the existence) of large-scale capitalism and modern industry, altering the nature of social status, and creating a new communal or reciprocal productive relationship through new priorities, ideals, and extensive governmental control and regulation. The goal of accelerated economic modernization was often espoused ..."

(Stanley G. Payne - A History of Fascism 1914-1945 - University of Wisconsin Press, 1995 - p. 10)

Still, private property was carefully preserved and property rights meticulously enforced. Ownership of assets was considered to be a mode of individualistic expression (and, thus, "self-assertion") not to be tampered with.

This second type of tension transformed many of the fascist organizations into chaotic, mismanaged, corrupt, and a-moral groups, lacking in direction and in self-discipline. They swung ferociously between the pole of malignant individualism and that of lethal collectivism.

III. Utopianism vs. Struggle

Fascism was constantly in the making, eternally half-baked, subject to violent permutations, mutations, and transformations. Fascist movements were "processual" and, thus, in permanent revolution (rather, since fascism was based on the negation of other social forces, in permanent civil war). It was a utopian movement in search of a utopia. Many of the elements of a utopia were there - but hopelessly mangled and mingled and without any coherent blueprint.

In the absence of a rational vision and an orderly plan of action - fascist movements resorted to irrationality, the supernatural, the magical, and to their brand of a secular religion. They emphasized the way - rather than the destination, the struggle - rather than the attainment, the battle - rather than the victory, the effort - rather than the outcome, or, in short - the Promethean and the Thanatean rather than the Vestal, the kitschy rather than the truly aesthetic.

IV. Organic vs. Decadent

Fascism emphasized rigid social structures - supposedly the ineluctable reflections of biological strictures. As opposed to politics and culture - where fascism was revolutionary and utopian - socially, fascism was reactionary, regressive, and defensive. It was pro-family. One's obligations, functions, and rights were the results of one's "place in society". But fascism was also male chauvinistic, adolescent, latently homosexual ("the cult of virility", the worship of the military), somewhat pornographic (the adoration of the naked body, of "nature", and of the young), and misogynistic. In its horror of its own repressed androgynous "perversions" (i.e., the very decadence it claimed to be eradicating), it employed numerous defense mechanisms (e.g., reaction formation and projective identification). It was gender dysphoric and personality disordered.

V. Elitism vs. Populism

All fascist movements were founded on the equivalent of the Nazi Führerprinzip. The leader - infallible, indestructible, invincible, omnipotent, omniscient, sacrificial - was a creative genius who embodied as well as interpreted the nation's quiddity and fate. His privileged and unerring access to the soul of the fascist movement, to history's grand designs, and to the moral and aesthetic principles underlying it all - made him indispensable and worthy of blind and automatic obedience.

This strongly conflicted with the unmitigated, all-inclusive, all-pervasive, and missionary populism of fascism. Fascism was not egalitarian (see section above). It believed in a fuzzily role-based and class-based system. It was misogynistic, against the old, often against the "other" (ethnic or racial minorities). But, with these exceptions, it embraced one and all and was rather meritocratic. Admittedly, mobility within the fascist parties was either the result of actual achievements and merit or the outcome of nepotism and cronyism - still, fascism was far more egalitarian than most other political movements.

This populist strand did not sit well with the overweening existence of a Duce or a Führer. Tensions erupted now and then but, overall, the Führerprinzip held well.

Fascism's undoing cannot be attributed to either of these inherent contradictions, though they made it brittle and clunky. To understand the downfall of this meteoric latecomer - we must look elsewhere, to the 17th and 18th century.

Looking forward to our next dialog!