

Dr. C. George Boeree:

## Seven Perspectives



E-Text Source:

[ <http://www.ship.edu/%7Ecgboree/sevenpersp.html> ]

Copyright 1998 C. George Boeree  
Shippensburg University, USA

## **Index**

---

The autistic perspective	3
The authoritarian perspective	3
The rationalistic perspective	4
The mechanistic perspective	5
The cybernetic perspective	5
The epistemic perspective	6
The transcendental perspective	7
<b>Morality</b>	8
<b>Development</b>	9
<b>Mental Illness</b>	10
The autistic disorders	10
The authoritarian disorders	11
The rationalistic disorders	12
Beyond the rationalistic	12
<b>Societies</b>	14

Although my intuition leads me to believe that there is, ultimately, only one reality – infinite and eternal – experience leads me to believe that there are as many views or perspectives of that reality as there are conscious creatures. Each of us has a different genetic inheritance, different health histories, different cultural backgrounds, different upbringings, unique individual experiences... and so on. It is a surprise to me that we agree about the world as much as we do! Even more: Our views of reality change over the years and even from moment to moment as our situations and moods change. It would seem, at first pass, that any attempt to reduce these views or perspectives to a few categories or types would be doomed before it began!

But then, study of the history of ideas and the development of individual minds suggests to me that, perhaps, there are a few clusters we can point to – complexes of ideas that gravitate to each other, perhaps because they share some logical connectedness that goes beyond individual variation.

The idea of some number of epistemological "types," "categories," "stages," or "levels" is, of course, nothing new. Toynbee, Sorokin, Piaget, Kohlberg, Perry, and many, many others, have put forth their thoughts on the matter – and I would like to do the same. The following ideas are an extension of my Perspectives Theory and were inspired by the work of Rachel Lauer. To be succinct, I have come to believe that we can separate out seven such perspectives and that we can further organize them into three broader categories as well as into a rough developmental hierarchy.

### **The autistic perspective**

---

The first perspective I call the autistic. I don't believe that anyone is ever completely involved in this perspective, but it is best seen in infants, autistic children, and severely psychotic adults. On the other hand, we all slip into this perspective from time to time, most obviously when we are dreaming, but also when we engage in instinctive, automatic, or defensive behavior.

A person taking the autistic view believes that their personal subjective perspective is, in fact, the only perspective, and that, to the extent that the consciousness of others is recognized at all, everyone sees reality this same way. It is, in other words, egocentric and self-oriented, even solipsistic. In infants (and one might presume, in animals), the autistic perspective is one that stays very close to immediate reality as presented by the senses and feelings. In older children and adults, it is likely to include a perfect faith in one's own construction of reality, including all the differentiations one has learned. In the case of the psychotic, those differentiations might include some very sophisticated constructions developed prior to the slide back into autism.

"Symptoms" of autistic perception and cognition in normal children and adults include ideas of magic, especially magical efficacy, and animism, i.e., the idea that other entities, including animals, plants, and even physical phenomena, also perceive and respond to events as the person does.

### **The authoritarian perspective**

---

The authoritarian view is a common one – perhaps the most common one. It is a step above the autistic in that, although it is a subjective view, it takes into account the views of others. In fact, it may be said to absorb the views of others. Developmentally, the simple fact of living among other human beings leads one out of the autistic into the authoritarian. The child must inevitably broaden his or her perspective to

encompass that of "significant others," if only to survive. In most circumstances, this process is enormously simplified by the fact that all of a child's immediate contacts share most of a single social reality.

This is the perspective that most fully accepts social reality. This means, however, that an authoritarian person accepts only one social reality, and understands it as universal. Someone who does not accept the same social reality is seen as either an infant or insane. When the social reality is threatened, either by another social reality or by more immediate experiences, the tendency is for defensive mechanisms to engage, although further epistemological development is another possibility.

Most children, as well as the adults of a primitive, isolated, or highly structured traditional societies, will take this position. There is a tendency to legalistic thinking and an inordinate respect for tradition, even when painful. Further, authoritarians tend to classify events, objects, and even people in pigeon-hole types or categories, with relatively few gradations. And they tend to believe in universal dualities – black vs white, good vs bad, us vs them... – with little room for "in between" or "both."

Both the autistic and the authoritarian views are "subjective" views, in the sense that they believe in and value the interpretation, whether individual or social, of experience more than the experience itself. In the autistic, the value of events relative to individual needs and desires is more important than truth as some of the higher perspectives would understand it. In the authoritarian, the weight of valuing has simply shifted to the social surround.

In either case, at least when we consider people beyond the infancy stage, there is in addition a particular faith in the power of words, which is in keeping with their attachment to constructed reality.

### The rationalistic perspective

---

The next three perspectives (rationalistic, mechanistic, and cybernetic) together constitute the "objective" views, in contrast to the previous "subjective" ones. They share the idea that truth has an objective existence to be discovered outside of either personal or social realities. Developmentally (and historically) speaking, we see in these objective perspectives an acknowledgement that we may be mistaken, as individuals and as societies.

For this reason alone, it is not surprising that we only see these objective perspectives among the exceptional intellects and the well-traveled of traditional societies, and that these perspectives only become more common in multi-cultural societies, especially the world-spanning cultures of the last few centuries. Even then, these perspectives are not available to everyone, and may very well be defended against. It should also not be surprising that, in modern societies, it is still only the child in the second half of elementary school that begins to exhibit these objectivist qualities.

The rationalistic perspective values reason, logic, technicalities, words, and, if sufficiently sophisticated, mathematics. It is an idealistic perspective in that the objective truth it seeks is held to be contained by the mind. When someone brought up in the authoritarian tradition is exposed to other social realities beyond his or her own, he or she is most likely to begin by seeking commonalities among those social realities, commonalities that inhere in the words and other symbolic approaches of the societies or cultures involved. These are, by nature, psychological or ideal.

Developmentally, the late elementary school child and early adolescent are the best examples, with all their well known tendency to argument and idealism. Historically, the ancient Greeks, most especially Pythagoras and Plato, are the best examples, although Aristotle, with his enormous contributions to logical thought, can hardly be left out. We might also include the rationalists – Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz – although much of their philosophies include mechanistic, cybernetic, and higher epistemological qualities. Likewise, Piaget

has certain qualities we could call rationalistic, but those are even more supplemented by other, higher perspectives.

### The mechanistic perspective

---

The mechanistic perspective is the perspective we find in classical science: Though not disdainful of logic and mathematics, it views truth as something to be discovered outside the mind, in the world. It is empirical in emphasis rather than rationalistic, and materialistic rather than idealistic. In fact, it tends to denigrate the ideal, even while it seeks universal laws! It, more than the rationalistic or the cybernetic, is the most likely view to condemn subjectivism and to emphatically strive for a pure objectivism. Since the goals of the mechanistic perspective involve independence from all subjectivity, it tends to focus on quantity as the only significant quality, and on cause and effect (even when understood as non-necessary) over all other relations. And these emphases in turn make the mechanistic view notably reductionistic, especially when it addresses psychological phenomena.

The mechanistic view often goes so far as to deny the existence of non-material qualities, even consciousness itself. This is in strong contrast to the rationalistic view, which instead tends to denigrate matter, considering it corrupt or degenerate, and sometimes dismissing it altogether. Unlike the cybernetic and higher perspectives, however, the mechanistic view seems oblivious to the contradictions involved in these denials, the effects of the observer on the observed, and the nature of the scientific approach as an epistemology. This commonly results in a tendency to replace older explanatory structures, without consideration of the possible truths they may contain, with the "religion of science" we might call scientism.

The mechanistic is most likely to be found, in people growing up in a modern society, among adolescents and young adults. It is a youthful, exuberant perspective, with a great deal of power and practical application. Much of the successful side (and some of the dark side) of the modern world is due to mechanistic thinking.

### The cybernetic perspective

---

The cybernetic tends to be the most mature of the three objective views because it requires certain realizations that are rare among rationalistic and mechanistic people: The cybernetic person has fully recognized that the observer influences the observed, that there is no empirical demonstration of the existence of matter, that there is some sort of reality to non-material events, and that the mechanistic understanding of cause and effect is far too limiting – too linear – an understanding of relationships.

In some senses, the cybernetic view is a synthesis of the rationalistic and the mechanistic. Accepting both reason and empiricism, and both material and non-material realities, it adopts a philosophy of neutral monism (or similar views such as pluralism or double-aspectism) and a methodology of modeling. The experimental method is now viewed not as a testing of causal connections but as an effort at comparing the functioning of a model with the functioning of the larger reality. Originally, that model was a verbal theory, but as the cybernetic view develops beyond the mechanistic, models begin to include other structures and their processes, the most obvious being the use of computer simulations.

Our own society is being rapidly pulled into the cybernetic perspective, and we can see its impact in the prevalence of systems approaches in all fields of science. We see ecology as a (or is it the?) major approach in biology, a revolution in computer and software design, the cognitive revolution in psychology, and so on. We see everywhere an acknowledgement of the implications of relativity and uncertainty, both in their

"physics" senses and their more generalized senses. Perhaps the best sign of the dominance of the cybernetic approach is the use of the word information, which is, pretty clearly, the preferred term for that neutral substance which is neither material nor mental.

In psychology, this cybernetic approach is the newest wave after the collapse of the highly mechanistic behaviorist tradition. There is great pride being taken in the impact that psychology is having on other fields, although the credit may have to go more to linguistics than psychology. Nevertheless, it does seem that many humanistic and social science fields are now more aware of the psychological side of their fields, especially the idea that the observer has a significant impact on the observed – e.g. that societies and cultures and art and literature and music and so on are "in the eyes of the beholder."

Even the idea that logic and truth are psychological qualities has become popular. Unfortunately, few seem to recognize that making logic dependent on the individual means there is no true logic at all – including the logic it took to come to the conclusion that logic is psychological to begin with!

Another criticism of the cybernetic perspective is that, by turning to the neutral substance of information, it has turned away from immediate experienced reality quite completely. Where is truth? In the cybernetic view, it certainly can't be in the colorful, noisy, warm-blooded, emotional world we experience directly. It must instead be in the cold gray on-off world of information! Even the mechanistic view has its solid material, and the rationalistic world its forms and images.

Although the rationalistic, mechanistic, and cybernetic are rather equal in terms of complexity, they do tend to arise, both historically and in individual development, in the order given. The rationalistic view allows easier transition from the authoritarian valuing of symbols; the mechanistic is the most representative of the three (so perhaps less "contaminated" by authoritarian and epistemic perspectives); and the cybernetic begins to acknowledge the problems that the epistemic attempts to address.

## **The epistemic perspective**

---

The last two perspectives can best be understood as a synthesis of the subjective views and the objective views. The epistemic approach accepts the immediate experienced reality of individual consciousness as true, yet recognizes that there are as many of these "realities" as there are perceivers. The true, ultimate reality is therefore understood as the sum of all these perspectives, plus much that is unperceived. Unlike the objectivist approaches, which insist that we subtract our subjectivity from our observations to arrive at an ultimate reality much reduced from experience, the epistemic view sees ultimate reality as all views added together, and then some!

The perspective, then, could be labeled intersubjective, rather than subjective or objective, or we could use the term phenomenological. Whatever label we give it, it is accepting of multiple perceived realities and deals well with the difficulties of relativity and uncertainty, yet maintains a "faith" (which is nonetheless founded empirically and rationally) in ultimate reality. If it isn't yet clear to the reader, this is the perspective adopted by Perspectives Theory itself.

There are, however, some negative points to the epistemic approach: It is, for example, far less "efficient" than the mechanistic or cybernetic approaches, because it tends to shy away from the kind of closure required for action. The epistemic person often has very little need for closure, and will tend to continue to wait for more views on the matter. Although this is may be a virtue in regard to psychological or sociological understanding, it may be an unnecessary drag in technological sciences and issues. In other words, epistemic people may not be terribly practical.

They may also appear authoritarian. Since all views have some value, they may tend to support a particular

view, perhaps a minority position, to the point of seeming dogmatic. However, when others begin to see their point, they may very well switch their allegiance to another position. So then they appear indecisive or equivocal, if not argumentative or contrary. There is a lot to be valued here, however: What they are really exhibiting is their openness and tolerance.

The epistemic is rather naturally liberal. Another potential flaw, then, is what I call the liberal fallacy: All alternative perspectives are equally valuable and deserve equal defense. Liberals in all fields often find themselves defending fringe positions and people of unusual, if not psychotic, character. This then undermines their otherwise sophisticated and generous positions on issues. A psychologist, for example, who believes that the schizophrenic's view of reality must be respected in order to be understood runs the risk of being considered psychotic himself by his colleagues. Likewise, the person of liberal politics may find he or she is supporting the rights of others that he or she would otherwise find quite unsavory. Another way of putting it is that people, in all the previous perspectives, tend to move to a single clear position, even so far as to say "this is the way it is." The epistemic perspective is the first that tends to avoid such conclusions.

## The transcendental perspective

---

There is one more perspective I can see, even though I'd be the first to admit that I am rarely, if ever, "in" it: the transcendental perspective. It is even more "open," "impractical," and "flaky" than the epistemic, from the perspective of most of modern society, although primitive and traditional societies seem more accepting of it. It involves, as the name implies, transcending the multiple perspectives of the epistemic and coming into contact with the ultimate reality. This is done by stripping away constructed reality altogether, through various techniques, most especially meditation, and concentrating on immediate reality. This ultimately involves the diminution of desire and self. That means moving closer and closer to an unconscious state while retaining the ability to retain the experience. In a very real sense, it is a matter of dying – or almost dying – and returning to everyday reality with a new perspective on life — the transcendental perspective!

Since eastern traditions have made quite an impact on the west in the last century or so, quite a number of words have become current as labels for this perspective: satori, buddhahood, enlightenment, nirvana, cosmic consciousness, and so on. A particularly good label is Maslow's peak experiences, in that it distances the phenomenon from particular religious practices and philosophical points of view, and especially recognizes that the experience is one that normal people can have in their everyday lives, not one only available to monks seated in the lotus position. It describes any experience in which one loses one's sense of individual separateness and feels instead a strong sense of union with all consciousness, life, the universe, or God.

A couple of things should be made clear about the transcendental perspective: One is that it is, like the autistic, more a direction than a stage. One simply can't stay there and continue to exist. It is more an attitude that is reinforced by brief and occasional experiences of transcendence. Another is that, by its very nature, the transcendental perspective is not one amenable to much discussion. Words and other symbols are part of the problem of constructed reality, in that we tend to reify them and then think of them as prior to their referents.

So, although words are not in and of themselves an anathema to transcendence, they are potential pitfalls along the path. The very first chapter of the Tao te Ching, for example, warns us that the Tao that can be talked about isn't the true Tao. And Zen warns its students to never mistake the finger that points at the moon for the moon itself.

With those points made, I will take my own advice and cease to discuss the transcendental perspective.

It is a good idea to mention at this point that I am not constructing these perspectives as hard and fast pigeon

holes of personality. Each of us operates at all these levels, often simultaneously. In fact, I would suggest that we need to use each of these perspectives at various times. I don't want to be epistemic when shoveling snow, or authoritarian with a client, or mechanistic with my children. I do want to be autistic in my dreams, transcendental concerning death, and cybernetic with my computer! Nevertheless, there are likely to be perspectives that we are more proficient at, that we use more often, or that we feel more comfortable in. Perhaps we could visual ourselves as a string of pearls, the largest one somewhere in the middle, strung out over the seven perspectives.

I should also point out that I am not thinking of these as static either: We move among these perspectives, and along them to the extent that they have a developmental validity. In fact, as you will see, I believe that a lack of movement is cause for serious concern!

## Morality

---

Each of the seven perspectives has a view of value – good and bad – as well, which follows pretty clearly from a perspective's overall description. For the autistic perspective, good is what pleases oneself, bad what hurts. Morality is a simple, innocent hedonism. The autistic morality is fairly congruent with Piaget's pre-operational morality, Kohlberg's preconventional level, and Bronfenbrenner's self-oriented morality.

In the authoritarian view, the good is founded in tradition and in the authoritarian promotion of that tradition. As Sorokin would put it, this is a morality of absolute principles, usually viewed as being handed down to humanity by God. It is similar to Piaget's concrete operations morality, Kohlberg's conventional level, Bronfenbrenner's other-oriented type, and Perry's authoritarian stage.

The objective views are similar to Piaget's formal operations morality, Kohlberg's post-conventional level, and Bronfenbrenner's objectively-oriented morality. Perry's term for these perspectives is relativism, which makes a crucial point about values from the objectivist perspective: Since valuing appears to be a subjective thing, the objective approaches, being aware that the individual or societal view is limited and likely biased, tends to be quite confused about values, if they don't avoid values altogether. The tendency is epitomized by the mechanistic view.

The rationalistic perspective is one that focuses on universal principles. We can see more clearly here why the rationalistic fits best between the authoritarian and the mechanistic: The rationalistic view takes the absolutes of various authoritarian perspectives and seeks the commonalities among them, ultimately to discover what, presumably, any rational person might agree to. There is often the idea, as Sorokin points out, that these ultimate principles come from God, while subordinate principles, accounting for all the varieties of moral systems, come from Man. Note that this is similar to Kohlberg's stage of universal principles, the sixth and final stage of his system. I place it before the mechanistic view, which is comparable to Kohlberg's fifth stage, the stage of the social contract.

The mechanistic view is utilitarian, often focused on social contract. As Sorokin puts it, morality is relativistic and founded on man-made principles. In its extreme form, the mechanistic view sees morality as purely subjective and without universality. Moral or value judgments, therefore, are a matter of individual taste or social custom, i.e. relative. At first glance, this may seem rather epistemic, in that the mechanistic sees each person's moral perspective as equally valid. But if you look closer, you see that they are equally valid in that they are equally empty of meaning! Where there is no God (universal values), anything is permitted! At its worst, the mechanistic view reduces values to material force – i.e. might makes right, survival of the fittest, and so on.

The cybernetic view of values is, true to form, an interactive one. The impact of the valuer becomes important, and moral judgments are viewed as having contexts. It makes a distinction between relativistic



morals and situated morals. It is this view that I think better accounts for the highly moral women that Kohlberg's student, Carol Gilligan, wrote about. These women, because they kept moral judgments in the context of social expectations, individual pains and pleasures, and so forth, were judged by traditional Kohlberg standards as being of rather low moral development, conventional (authoritarian) if not lower. Instead, I see them as a higher form, approaching the epistemic. However, unlike Gilligan, I see this as more advanced than either universal principles or social contract, and as not at all restricted to women, though certainly more commonly found among them in our society.

The epistemic perspective views moral value as phenomenological, that is, as necessarily involving consciousness, yet having its own ontological reality. That is, good is to be found in the interaction of mind and world, yet is not to be dismissed as therefore somehow unreal – especially when you consider that all reality, to the extent that we have anything to do with it, is a matter of such interaction! Another way to understand it is to see goodness (and badness) as another real qualitative dimension.

While the great majority of differences between cultures or individuals have nothing to do with moral judgement, other differences are moral. Hence, the epistemic person respects the variety of individual and social perspectives, yet does not shy away from recognizing that some perspectives are better than others. We could say that the good is a direction in which we prefer to move, a direction, perhaps of self-actualization (or even life-actualization), which is quite real, yet which cannot be expressed in the form of absolute universal principles.

In terms of day-to-day choices and decisions, I think this approach works by adopting certain principles as guidelines to action. Hence, the epistemic morality at least functions like Perry's idea of commitment. It is also similar to the existentialist idea of the project, in which one declares a value system (among other things), and commits oneself to it. However, it should be noted that existentialism – especially in its Sartrean form – can be terribly relativistic.

Finally, in the transcendental mode of morality, the good is what is done. It is an expression of one's intimacy with the universe, with the needs of all life, the desire of all consciousness. The good is an expression, as Spinoza might put it, of God-or-Nature, and we are capable of recognizing it intuitively. Again, I'm only speculating rather than describing when it comes to this perspective.

## **Development**

---

As mentioned earlier, there is a degree to which these perspectives can be organized from simplest to most mature, even if each view has its situational strengths and weaknesses. Only among the three objective views is there much room for argument. And certainly, if we disregard this taxonomy altogether for a moment, there is a movement towards a richer, more complex, more encompassing understanding of reality throughout life. At least there should be if the person can be said to be healthy and self-actualizing.

Movement towards complexity via continued interaction with the world and adaptation when one's knowledge fails is an aspect of self-actualization which I call elaboration. We can discern two "moments" in this movement: differentiation and integration.

In childhood, it seems that differentiation dominates. It is really a simple matter of needing to accumulate data before one is even faced with the task of integrating it. So children, from the adult perspective, seem like sponges, absorbing even trivia at astounding rates. There is, of course, a great deal of integration going on as well, but it is not as salient as the simple differentiation.

In adulthood, on the other hand, much of the differentiation our lives require has already been accomplished, and integration becomes more salient, at least in adults that continue to elaborate. And in a rich and complex

society such as our own, there is even a great deal of pressure towards integration: Many adults feel a degree of "information overload," and the reduction and simplification of this overload becomes a strong motivation.

Bringing this back to our taxonomy of perspectives, we can see a rough (and only rough) parallel between the perspectives and developmental ages: The autistic is the stage of infancy; the authoritarian, early childhood; the rationalistic, late childhood; the mechanistic, adolescence; the cybernetic, young adulthood; the epistemic, late adulthood; the transcendental, old age.

## Mental Illness

---

There are innumerable circumstances which lead to a halt or even a reversal in the movement towards elaboration. In the developmental sense, these are a matter of being faced by situations that are too complex to be dealt with, either in terms of differentiation or integration. On a more immediate level, these are situations where knowledge cannot keep up with reality, where anticipation fails, yet adaptation is not immediately possible. Emotionally, we are talking about episodes of fear that are not resolved and so lead to continued anxiety and the defensive maneuvers that may accompany it, as well as long-term sadness and anger (i.e., depression and hostility).

These situations may be a matter of a single traumatic event or long-term problems that could even be rather insignificant were it not for their continuity or repetition. There are certainly physical problems that could have these results, such as the trauma of natural disasters or the long-term effects of chronic illness. Most physical events, however, have been well-covered by the evolution of genetically based physiological mechanisms, and so are fairly well dealt with unless extreme. On the other hand, traumas and continual incongruencies within the social reality are more often than not insufficiently addressed by physiological mechanisms, even to the point of damaging those mechanisms, as in psychophysiological disorders. Because constructed reality is in fact constructed, it is much more likely to contain within it conflicts with immediate experience as well as internal inconsistencies such as the famous "catch 22" or "damned if you do – damned if you don't."

Traumas – social or physical – are a fairly simple matter, in the sense that the symptoms (such as phobic responses, compulsive behaviors, specific amnesias, etc.) can usually be directly tied to the traumatic event (although this does not mean they are easily taken care of!). I believe many more of our problems derive from the day-to-day difficulties of dealing with a reality – especially a social reality – that is beyond our capacity, that is just a little too complex for us, that is just a bit too chaotic. In fact, I think the term "chaotic environment" may cover the great majority of causes for human unhappiness in modern society, and especially in the less-precisely defined disorders.

In the following examples, it should again be understood that we are talking about an interaction of physical and social environments with specific temperaments as well as specific individual experiences. A "weak" temperament is much more likely to be overwhelmed by traumas or a chaotic environment than is a "strong" one. On the other hand, a "strong" temperament may nevertheless develop certain problems, given strong-enough trauma or chaotic-enough environment. To make things even more complicated, a weak temperament may be compensated for with strong learning experiences, or a strong temperament weakened with inadequate learning.

## **The autistic disorders**

---

This understood, we can see autistic children and schizophrenic adults as people who have been driven back into an autistic perspective by the complexities or violence of a reality they are not prepared, temperamentally or cognitively, to deal with. Their autistic view is not natural to them, as it might be to an infant, in that they already have a degree of experience with the world, including social reality. It must therefore be supported by a defensive avoidance of difficult situations – i.e. of situations that they paradoxically need to face and adapt to in order to progress beyond their autistic perspective.

We must always begin where the patient is. So, in the case of the autistic or schizophrenic person, we must begin with their personal reality and the defenses which they use to maintain it. In other words, we must first take great pains to shelter them from perceptions of danger. Only when they feel safe, in an often highly simplified environment, can we begin to gradually introduce the kinds of complexities, in watered down versions, in which they may find the differentiations they need to adapt and move out of their personal world. These differentiations cannot lead in any direct fashion to mature perspectives, but must only be directed at an authoritarian world-view. Ironically, in order to help schizophrenics, we must lead them towards conventionality!

Please keep in mind that this is not a theory of types and categories! "The autistic perspective" as well as "autism" and "schizophrenia" should really be used only with such quotes around them. They are convenient fictions to aid in communications, and should not be reified. In reality, people perceive and behave in certain ways at certain times in certain places with certain others, and each person is a unique entity that defies consistent classification. Thus there are plenty of "intermediate" terms, such as the schizoid personality and paranoia, which should be made use of when we make diagnoses, and we must ultimately rely on detailed description and personal interaction to understand the individual.

## **The authoritarian disorders**

---

The authoritarian neurotic is a person who retreats from the complexity of life into the authoritarian structures of a social reality. Again, the neurotic is not a child, nor a peasant in some traditional society, so this authoritarian world-view must be supported by defensive mechanisms that help him or her to avoid full recognition of traumas and chaos. Because it is that very complexity that will lead them further towards elaborative development, it is especially the neurotic who is responding to a chaotic environment who will be most broadly effected, while the neurotic responding to specific traumas may well develop further in domains not tied to that of the trauma.

The authoritarian neurotic will tend to exhibit his or her rigid sociality in one of two ways: Depending on such factors as temperament, upbringing, and specific social situation, they will be either aggressive or compliant. Aggressive neurotics, predominantly men (due to both temperament and upbringing), tend to expect others to bend to their will, and are likely to be angry and even violent if their expectations are not met. Compliant neurotics, predominantly women (again, due to both temperament and upbringing), tend to expect to yield to the will of others. They suffer from sadness and spend much of their cognitive time trying to adapt, i.e. trying accept into themselves changes that would be more efficiently accomplished by changing others (most often, the aggressive males they keep company with!).

But please notice that both aggressiveness and compliance change depending on the people you are interacting with: The aggressive man is likely to become quite compliant when faced with a clear social superior; the compliant woman is likely to be quite aggressive towards her children or servants. In a traditional society, these relations operate quite smoothly, with very little overt anger or sadness, and

certainly without much sadism or masochism. Among neurotics, the defensive mechanisms change the anxiety that is at the root of the neurosis into anger or sadness, even to the point of sadism and masochism. As Freud pointed out, these are just two sides of the same coin, which is the authoritarian perspective.

To help someone grow out of their authoritarian perspective, one must begin with authority. It is these people that are most influenced by the therapist's status, and are particularly susceptible to suggestion. The point is to use authority to move the authoritarian beyond the confines of his or her rigid social reality, so that they might recognize the variety of perspectives possible. They are far from being ready to adopt the non-closure attitudes of the epistemic, but they can learn tolerance of others and a habit of looking for the commonalities or the broader view. They must learn to reason independently of social categories, to stop seeing all issues as black and white, to entertain an experimental attitude towards their problems, and to see the complexities of issues – i.e. to become familiar with rationalistic, mechanistic, and cybernetic views, at least to the extent that they can move beyond their authoritarian rigidity. All this must occur within a very secure environment, one that does not engage their defensive mechanisms.

### **The rationalistic disorders**

---

When we come to the objectivist views, we find that the person has already dealt with much of the complexity of the world, and is in fact more concerned with integrating what he or she has learned. The rationalistic, however, does still face some chaos and trauma which might lead him or her to fixate at this perspective with defensive thoughts and behaviors. Instead of retreating into rigid social structures like the authoritarian neurotic, however, the rationalistic neurotic retreats into rigid personal structures.

Rationalistic disorders can range from full-blown obsessive-compulsive to anxiety neurosis to compulsive personality, but is best represented by the rather mild but enormously common personality type we could call the perfectionist. Among the qualities perfectionists tend to exhibit are a love of order in their own lives, including neatness and punctuality, and a tendency to foist that order onto others, sometimes to the point that they resemble authoritarian types, except that the order they demand is not so much society's order, but an order that they feel they themselves best represent – all this stemming, of course, from their fear of the chaos they see on the horizon.

They may also appear rather narcissistic, especially to the degree that they consider themselves ideal specimens, but again that narcissism isn't a true autistic one, but rather a defensive reaction to their fears and anxieties. The give-away that they are rationalistic, rather than authoritarian or autistic, is that they consider their rigid structures universal rather than just social mores, while nevertheless being fully aware of the reality of other ways of being. They love logic and reasoning and tend to consider themselves supremely logical whether it is among their talents or not, and consider the lack of logic to be the major flaw of others.

I believe that the best way to help the perfectionist is to reason with him or her. By carefully introducing arguments that lead beyond the rationalistic approach, in such a way as to resolve the issues of chaos that frighten them, they may come to terms with their fears. Some of the approaches, such as Horney's, Ellis's, and Raimy's, that emphasize problems of thought or conception, might be more fruitful than others.

### **Beyond the rationalistic**

---

Once we get beyond the rationalistic, we find ourselves on what we might want to see as a downward arc, involving a preference for integration which may even include a desire for problems, incongruities,

paradoxes, and chaos as recognized aids to further development. But, while they are less likely to be frightened, they may very well become confused! We can look at Maslow's long list of "metapathologies" for inspiration here, or at the literature of alienation.

The kinds of pathologies the mechanistic perspective leaves us most open to are ones that can be traced from the mechanistic view's tendency to reduce self to physiology, mind to brain, consciousness to epiphenomenon, values to tastes, morals to customs, and truth to opinion. The feeling that nothing is tied down, that nothing, including myself, is real, that the whole world is some kind of illusion – i.e. depersonalization and derealization – is very common to this view. So is the sense that everything I do is meaningless, that not much of what I do has any effect anyway, and most especially that there is no right and wrong. With all values relative, perhaps the supreme symptom of mechanistic unhappiness is directionlessness.

The cybernetic perspective may suffer from the same difficulties as the mechanistic, although it is less likely to have problems dealing with the complexities of reality in the first place. However, the "neutral monism" of information that the cybernetic view takes as fundamental is even further removed from the richness of immediate experience than the materialism of the mechanistic view. A complaint we may expect from the cybernetic person is one of emptiness or deadness and the desire to return to a simpler but more sensuous mode of being. Fortunately, with the cybernetic's capacity for complexity, sensitivity to context, and awareness of the place of the observer, as well as his or her acceptance of a cybernetic, self-guiding value system, it is more likely that the cybernetic person will slip into the epistemic mode on their own.

The epistemic person is least likely to suffer from neuroses or alienation, but most likely to suffer from indecisiveness. One of the most likely pathologies at this level is withdrawal from society and a refusal to be involved. That this is a pathology can be seen in how this contradicts with other epistemic principles, such as responsibility towards others.

But the epistemic's acceptance of the lack of closure also goes against our basic conservative nature: The mind, with all its anticipation and adaptation and elaboration of knowledge, is geared towards "swallowing the universe," that is increasing comprehension of reality. It is paradoxical, to say the least, that at the epistemic level, one must give up the possibility of this ideal in order to continue to satisfy our need to accomplish it!

Fortunately, the epistemic is so close to the final transcendent perspective that, even without the insights that transcendence implies, he or she is aware of their potential existence, and so is more likely than any other stage to be encouraged by problems rather than discouraged. The problems of the epistemic view are more likely founded in those other aspects of a person that are fixated at lower levels, and not from the epistemic view itself.

At any of the perspectives beyond the rationalistic, a person with problems is likely to be best helped by a form of therapy that emphasizes their freedom and responsibility, rather than one that demands the following of rules or authority. These people have quite some resources available to them – reason, habits of experiment, systems analysis, phenomenological observation – that will serve them to solve their own problems in their own unique fashion, if they are only given encouragement and support. I would suggest that Kellian "homework" might be especially suitable for mechanistic people, systems therapies might be appropriate for cybernetics, and that pure Rogerian or existentialist approaches might be best for epistemics, but each of these suggestions is only that – a suggestion.

In summary, then, pathology can be considered a matter of getting "stuck" on a curve of epistemological development due to trauma or chaotic environment, and therapy can be considered any technique that, beginning with the client's present view of things, shelters them enough, supports them enough, and encourages them enough to face the problems, resolve them, and begin to move further in their own elaboration and self-actualization.

## Societies

---

Societies do not have epistemologies; only individuals do. So we should not expect our taxonomy to so neatly reflect societal development as it does personal development. We can, however, place societies on the basis of the level of the mass of a society's people, or at least the level of the power-elite. Permit me to go out on a limb:

1. At the autistic level, we can only expect anarchy moderated by instinct – something I doubt has ever truly existed in the history of human beings.
2. At the traditional level, we find a large number of societies that Sorokin (1937-1940) calls, perhaps euphemistically, familistic: They tend to be universalistic, have realistic conceptions of the corporate "person" (i.e. the tribe, the state, the race...), tend to assume free will, and take a cyclical view of history. Modern "isms" that might be so characterized include absolute monarchy and fascism.
3. At the rationalistic level (Sorokin calls them "mixed") we might find constitutional monarchy and republicanism, as well as capitalist economics.
4. At the mechanistic level, we have what Sorokin call the contractual: Singularism predominates, as does a nominalistic conception of the corporate "person," a belief in determinism, and a progressive approach to history. Modern "isms" might include federalism, representational democracy, and welfarism.

Beyond this point we run into a problem finding examples or even conceptions.

5. Cybernetic societies, we might predict, should be slightly less efficient and somewhat more person-oriented than the mechanistic societies. We might expect referential democracy, meritocracy (in the best sense), and moderate socialism. Sorokin does mention "harmonism," including a dialectic approach to history, as a higher synthesis of the familistic and the contractual.
6. At the epistemic level, we might expect a decentralized, participatory democracy and a "grass roots" capitalism (communism at its best!). As it should be considerably less efficient than the mechanistic, we can expect its arrival only when the world is safe from physical and economic aggression, and indeed only when others find it in themselves to tolerate such developments.
7. And, finally, the transcendental society would presumably be an anarchy in the most positive sense. I suspect this will forever remain an ideal.

All this said, it should still be understood that all the perspectives, if they are indeed in some way universals, should be represented in all societies, from the most primitive to the most futuristic. Of course, the expression of each perspective will differ tremendously from society to society: The "mechanistic" in a primitive society may be represented by the practical, down-to-earth views of the village craftspeople, the "epistemic" by the leadership skills of a chief, and the "transcendental" by the ritual of the shaman. And perhaps the rationalistic and cybernetic have little meaning for a pre-literate culture.

On the other hand, some of what makes today's life difficult can also be understood: In a society as complex, pluralistic, and swiftly changing as ours, it may become increasingly difficult for many of us to face and transcend the "chaos" of our lives. It is a serious question, I believe, whether more and more of us will suffer from alienation and mental illness as we move into our future. I like to think that speculating on our psychosocial future in this way may help us deal with these problems successfully!