

Aiyo (Ariel Levy)

Graham Harman

Core Seminar 3

12 April 2024

Thresholds of a Psychobiological Being

There is no doubt that the intersection between biology and psychology is a field in which the thinkers on this planet have long questioned with respect to our perception of humanity, but the means we have utilized in determining which observations exist in ownership of each respective domain have predominantly been through the measure of a spectrum of counterparts incompatible to one another. As do oil and water, the dynamics of these theoretical teachings have yet to mix into homogeneity when stirred together; the dispersion of one floats as distinguished volumes in turbulence with the other, save for those few moments just as the twirling ends when they appear as a relatively uniform mixture. Religion and all theories of how – at least those which have not been scientifically proven beyond a reasonable doubt – and why humans have come to be are no exception to this variable; values that scale from our importance or unimportance as a species down to demarcating the required dedication of several hours each day toward worshiping one's deity or multiple have existed for several millenniums now. Instead, what is exceptional are the cases which reside within the enigma that is the threshold of biology vs psychology – the intersection between evolution and faith. Immanuel Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" provides unique insight as a non-religious approach to the same pedagogy religion has always approached, as does the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) models such as ChatGPT with its mechanic methodological approach to thinking. Kant's work is iconic for its

high articulation of how a human can achieve a state of being that is self-guided in thought and belief, rather than allowing dominant religions and governments of current-then and current-now to dictate our moral, theoretical, practicing, and personal values; the human world is imbued not in freedom, he tells us, and the way to liberating ourselves and it from what he describes as “self-imposed immaturity” is to begin thinking independently on the lively aspects which we ourselves have never been allowed to dictate in thought. One could presume that Immanuel Kant would likely not enjoy the rising popularity of AI text response language models, like ChatGPT, if he were alive to voice his beliefs today; for one, it undermines many of the more interesting points which his discourse details...

Immanuel Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" argues that enlightenment is humanity's emergence from self-imposed immaturity. He defines immaturity as the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from others. Kant contends that enlightenment involves the courage to think for oneself and the freedom to use reason independently. He criticizes the reliance on religious and governmental authorities for dictating beliefs and behaviors, advocating instead for individual autonomy and the pursuit of knowledge. Kant emphasizes the importance of public discourse and rational inquiry in achieving enlightenment and advancing society.

Just as Kant talks of not allowing governments and religions to dictate our autonomy, people, in reading this, will take it in as though it were a trusted human informing them of the totality of

this work. A reader familiar with the work would not be requesting a robot to tell it what Kant's writing is – one cannot fully comprehend its words without engaging with it for oneself – and so an unfamiliar will take its summary at face value and in whole, not knowing to ask the AI why its summary has forgone Kant's remarks such as the potential for chaos formed by a society of total mature evolutions, or how the self-imposition exists beyond embodiment of typical conservative religious preachings. Charles Darwin's writing in the opening of "The Foundations of the Origin of Species" reactively offers material that offers the potential resolution for how this self-imposition could be an acquired genetic trait and genetic evolution rather than one which is assumed exclusively in a place of mental being. In particular, with regard to the pursuit of autonomy, it is well documented on how this self-imposition comes, but why does it come? Is it a biological response that we have yet to evolve out of? Is it a psychological approach we use to cope with reality? And, even though the genuinely unique individualities of human writers are the founding of its conception, how will technologies like text language AI afflict our evolutionary threshold of biology vs psychology if we permit their continued integration with our minds and bodies?

Kant is very direct in opening his writing with his definition of enlightenment: a method of shedding one's immaturity – that is, their lack of confidence in self-guidance and curiosity for knowledge. It is an immaturity whose conception exists from the very beginning in self-doubt or incapability, which already delves an early question of its biological origin. As young beings we are reliant on the guardians who raise us in safety, providing shelter, necessities, and subsequently informing a large part of our identity that often transcends into our adult life. Is it not rational to question whether or not this external dependency on thoughts and opinions is one

which starts from birth, rather than being self-imposed as Kant believes it to be? Biological or not, Kant still recognizes the psychological difficulty in navigating such an uncertainty – to question all the orders and operations that one has relied on as support in life – and the naturally slow process of freeing the public; it is a liberation which requires nothing but being rational and thoughtful toward all aspects of existence. The first, and one of the reoccurring, exemplified subjects of immaturity is religious officials, such as priests or pastors: Kant argues that the teachings of these individuals are direct behavior of the immaturity as they preach words which are not of their own thought; they are instructed by a higher order, be it other members of the church above them or eventually up to the deity or deities of the worship in question. Do not misunderstand, though, Kant is not saying an enlightened being cannot exist in rational coherence of religion. Instead, he is insisting that those who do play into religion be considerate of their practices and beliefs – to, rather than unquestionably accept all information and teaches simply due to their associated divinity, understand the rationals and logics of the religion so that oneself can evaluate what is valid and what is not and to authentically live their individuality accordingly.

“Likewise a pastor is bound to instruct his catecumens and congregation in accordance with the symbol of the church he serves...But as a scholar he has complete freedom, indeed even the calling, to impart to the public all of his carefully considered and well-intentioned thoughts concerning mistaken aspects of that symbol...” (Kant)

The writing goes on to add that our unquestionability towards these symbols which remain constant throughout time can oftentimes subdue our own interests, which we would otherwise naturally partake in if not under these influences, that sharply stray from these teachings, and it’s

not exclusively for religious folk. Police, tax collectors, politicians, elected officials – it matters not your occupation, to act in such a stringent manner of thought, progression, and teaching is against the very essence of what it is to be human.

“One age cannot bind itself, and thus conspire, to place a succeeding one in a condition whereby it would be impossible for the later age to expand its knowledge (particularly where it is so very important), to rid itself of errors, and generally to increase its enlightenment. That would be a crime against human nature, whose essential destiny lies precisely in such progress...” (Kant)

While I put full faith in Kant’s words, there now exists a question similar to from before: the why. If living in a constant, non-expanding status of knowledge is the very crime against human nature, how is it the mannerism has become and remained so universal amongst the planet?

There have been several thousand years for opportunity of change, but still many go about their lives never daring to question the rationals of religion, government, and all operations on this planet. Kant has urged us that the transition for this constructed fabric is slow, but how slow can it be to the point at which there is no change at all?

Charles Darwin offers insight into what can closely be defined as the biological counterpart of and answers to Kant’s preachings. Rather than assuming our self-imposed limits to be of spiritual nature which can be changed with thoughtful intention, there is material here applicable to question if that rationale is a product of our biology which is unable to be altered during our lifespans. Darwin opens his research with the basis that is the adaptation of species’ biological traits over time as a method of survival; he talks of organs lost to time but still embodied, shared traits amongst intercontinental species, and how humans are learning to

interface and manipulate the evolutionary processes of certain species for their benefit in a selfish disregard to the implications which the species are subjected to. For centuries, both with and without the aid of technology which can modify genetic material, we have already been breeding chickens to mature with more meat, sheep to have more wool, and certain insects which eat other insects we dislike to reproduce at greater rates, all with total disregard to the paths of natural variation amongst each species and each member of each species...

“Variation depends on change of condition and selection {79}, as far as man’s systematic or unsystematic selection «has» gone; he takes external form, has little power from ignorance over internal invisible constitutional differences. Races which have long been domesticated, and have much varied, are precisely those which were capable of bearing great changes, whose constitutions were adapted to a diversity of climates. Nature changes slowly and by degrees...Man in past ages, could transport into different climates, animals and plants which would freely propagate in such new climates. Nature could effect, with selection, such changes slowly, so that precisely those animals which are adapted to submit to great changes have given rise to diverse races.” (Darwin)

It is well known that certain genetic markers lead certain individuals to carry themselves with varied levels of emotions whose cadence can sometimes be high enough to greatly affect their thought processes. Who is to not say, for example, that an individual whose biological being produces an overwhelming amount of anger hormones is not, by nature, drawn to religions whose practices engage in more violent spiritual practices? Or a being whose biology leads them to be greatly stubborn who is unwilling to consider the approaches of thought other than their own familiar methodology? While those examples admittedly rest on the extrema of scenario,

they are important in concept to Kant's encouragements of free-thinking in respect to religion and Darwin as he talks of the sort of sterilization that occurs when species are bred in hybrid or in isolation to achieve these evolutionary modifications. These are biological traits beings are forcibly subjected to which could potentially determine one's outlooks of thinking as biologically determined rather than socially determined.

Darwin makes important note that habits acquired by practice, that is habits which are not of genetic origin, can eventually become inherited as instincts. Absorption of religion into one's network of life, somewhere at some point, begins as a voluntary enrollment through an individual who was interested in incorporating it into their lives. Example: It may have been from many generations past, say a seven-times great Grandpa, who was interested in religion X that tested it, enjoyed it, introduced it to his family, and the family continued to practice religion X on and on. Historically, though, the voluntary choice of religion has been ever-diminishing as children are often instilled with the religion of their parent(s) and not infrequently forbidden from criticizing that religion and exploring others to make their individual choice as to where they resonate the most. This sort of enforcement is an exact sterilization of Darwin's words in regards to Kant's free-thinking; it reduces the variation of our species in thought not only in demographic data, but also in ability to question the religious values many are instilled with from adolescence that carry into adulthood. It inhibits our ability to evaluate and improve religious values generated so long ago that their teachings are from the mindset of humans who could now be considered species different from our own in regards to thought process. This is only furthered by Darwin's geological analysis of species' characteristics: he finds that birds at similar elevations and environmental conditions on different continents often share very similar conditions which arise

not from their genetics but from their locality. Their bodies have, in essence, become one with the environment, of which there is no need to change it. The social conditioning of humans in a heterogenous religious and theoretical environment are highly unlikely to evolve against that current when the environment is their parental figures and families, let alone their neighborhood, city, state, or country.

Darwin's theory on evolutionary pacing makes further application to the way in which biology offers explanation for the diminishing free-thinking spaces of religion: there is, he explains, a distinct speed to which the extermination of old genetics occurs that is unlike the very gradual and iterative process of new genetics becoming. "We see some forms now becoming rare and disappearing, we know of no sudden creation..." (Darwin). For a human of today to create and to nurse a new religion is a massive undertaking of which all odds are pitted against them – it is entering into a race of competitors who've built their strength in it for thousands of years, and, as such, the capacity for new forms of religion with alternative modes of pedagogy has long since gone. Instead, the primary courses for religion are to opt out of religion altogether, or to opt into one of the several most popular, or *maybe* find from the greater array a more niche one whose longevity is less certain. This sort of minimal array of selectivity is a reduction of thought – a state of static knowledge, if you will – that is the very idea Kant argues against; no good religion will hold its supporters to blindly follow its values as an ultimatum for all time. The classifications of these major religions as a checkbox which one must subscribe and label themselves to are an issue in themselves as well: it reduces individuals to the thinking that they have to be one of these and that they cannot be none or somewhere in-between; the language, in itself, of asking someone what their religion is by listing a series of popular options already reduces

that queried individual to the notion that they cannot be free-thinking. In a similar light, Darwin concludes his research with the point of classification, arguing that to organize all organisms under one classification is indeed against the precipice of biology; there is no way to, as he exemplifies, sort the utilitarian values of all organs because they all perform for different intents, though there is value in recognizing the natural systems which they share and how their morphological processes can weave in and out of alignment with one another throughout magnificent periods of time. Fish, bird, and mammal are no different from one another during the embryonic stages; it is only as they nurture in the womb that they then diverge into their unique biological machines and operations.

Just as there is common ancestry but varied biology amongst the species of the Earth, “Would it not be wonderful, if the union of two organisms, produced by two separate acts of Creation, blended their characters together when crossed according to the same rules, as two races which have undoubtedly descended from same parent stock” (Darwin). If one simply replaces the applicable biological terminology of the previous notions of classifications it is clear how self-imposed our biological being can be but how it does not have to be. There is room to instill ourself with free-thinking instinct so that if we can, metaphorically, recognize ourselves as the same biological beings in the womb from which we have grown into unique and varied fish, bird, and mammal.

“...only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no dread of shadows, yet who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous army to guarantee public peace, can say what no republic[12] may dare, namely: ‘Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!’” (Kant)

It is one of the final statements overlooked in ChatGPT's generated summary, and perhaps one of the most important. How could a society which is, in totality, formed from – in respect to Kant's definition of immaturity – mature humans function properly? Would the discourse not be so highly varied and unique that no decision could ever be made? Perhaps, as Kant may have overlooked, there is a slight aspect to our biology which requires at least some partition of immaturity within all of us, and within some being larger than others. A very essence imbued into our biology so that there may be an operating equalization between those who think too freely, those who are too construed to the teaching they've been fed, and those who lay ground in the threshold between. In accordance with that conception of threshold, perhaps there never was a timeless ultimatum for whether this behavior is biological or psychological, but somewhere in the unidentifiable volumes between those temporary moments where the oil and water are stirred together and momentarily appear homogenous.