

21. A Real Man Knows That Caring for Babies Is the Most Important Job on Earth

I would like to ask what I regard to be some important questions. As the conditioned mind operates on sensation to yield the knowable universe, what is happening? Can one gently place awareness on this operation and observe directly the structure of the mind and the process of creation?

To explore these questions, let's use the very common, and now mundane, example of a mother who for the first time is dropping off her terrified, screaming nine-month-old baby at daycare. The mother herself is crying uncontrollably, aware of nothing other than the sound of the horrific wailing from her baby, the urge to vomit, and her rational thought (the+ought) that this event must occur, in opposition to every single molecule of her being and every single packet of sensory stimulus. Is it fair to ask, as outside observers, what is happening here? Is this politically, or otherwise, an incorrect question? If we examine this question from a Yin perspective (as opposed to the Yang-dominated paradigm, which snaps rational answers into place like magnets onto steel), can we say whether there is some movement – mentally, psychologically, emotionally, physiologically? Can this movement be observed without the ego obeying its compulsion to compose an answer?

Can we, in particular as men, show the strength to fully “live in the question”?

When we do this, what happens?

A Metaphor: The Computer

Some contemporary philosophers compare human beings to computers when attempting to describe the very complex way that our culture evolves, and it starts with early brain development. Consider the nervous systems of human beings to be the hardware, while our language, conditioning, and socialization is the software. The hardware of a human is more-or-less fixed biologically, but how we behave is largely determined by the particular software, which can and does evolve.

Initial Software Installation

The software version 1.0 is installed in the very first months of life following conception. The health and stress levels of the mother during gestation is shared with the baby. Then at birth, the baby's body and nervous system continues to grow very rapidly compared to other species. Keep in mind that the human infant is born relatively helpless and early, cannot do anything on its own, and has a brain that is around only 20% of its adult size. This brain grows to nearly 80% by an age of 18 months. In order to walk upright humans must have relatively narrow hips, which means the infant's head and brain must be small and underdeveloped (compared to a horse or baboon, for instance) in order to get through the birth canal. This is a very important and absolutely wonderful fact of human brain development, because it means that the baby's

nervous system has the flexibility to adapt to the particular features of the environment into which it was conceived and born, thus maximizing its fitness to survive and reproduce later in life.

Here are the opposite ends of the spectrum of software paths:

1.0A If the environment is hostile, and the mother is experiencing threats that raise her fight-or-flight response (elevated cortisol, adrenaline, etc.), the baby's brain is also bathed in these chemicals, so that it can develop the appropriate proclivity (software platform) toward aggression and self-defensiveness. The prefrontal cortex (the seat of rationality and impulse control) grows slowly in deference to the more primitive brain regions that we share with other animals. Furthermore, a baby's real-time experience matters even more. Regardless of our "intentions", every time we let a baby "cry it out", or refuse to give it the skin-to-skin contact it wants when it wants it, or drop it off at daycare while it screams in terror; the baby experiences the corresponding chemical effects, and we are contributing to a particular brain development, version 1.0A software.

1.0B. If the environment is safe and nurturing, then the mother and baby together produce less of the stress chemicals and more oxytocin, opioids, dopamine, and other feel-good endorphins. The nervous system gets the type of software that makes it more empathetic, pro-social, and loving overall. The prefrontal cortex of such a baby is larger and stays larger for the rest of its life. It's been programmed to grow that way, maximizing impulse-control and ability to delay gratification. This is what we would call a more "humane" type of software. It also comes paired with a malware that is on the lookout for memes that are selfish, anti-social, and that promote aggression and defensiveness.

Despite the fact that the human brain is incredibly plastic and malleable, neurologists are discovering that many of these changes are epigenetic, hence practically permanent, or at least very difficult to change later in life. Someone with 1.0A software installation is much more likely to be an addict or a criminal than someone with 1.0B software. Brain scientists are mostly still in the dark about how it all works, but at least they now have established a firm correlation and are beginning to understand some of the physical mechanics behind these different development paths. The important take-away is that those early months are the most important in determining what type of adult the baby will grow up to be, and what type of society we have. Today, with the very high levels of virtual fight-or-flight reactions that most of us, including mothers, are experiencing, babies today are more and more likely to grow into unnecessarily hostile and close-minded adults with no effective malware, and with much lower odds at being rational, nurturing, and loving.

Of course, I describe versions 1.0A and 1.0B as two distinct types, but in this metaphor, they are the ends of a spectrum. Everyone lies somewhere along a continuum between.

Software upgrades

Once the initial installation occurs, it updates itself regularly within the parameters of the initial installed platform. We are socialized and conditioned, through the development of language, and any other memes as described above. As our culture changes, our software gets a new

version. Of course, these are not necessarily discrete versions as in a real computer, but they do occur automatically without our initiation, permission, or even conscious awareness. Only an intentionally conscious effort, an act of free will, can interrupt our culture's downloading of constant revisions. It takes tremendous humility - self-knowledge, discipline, non-conformity, and vigilance - to resist the temptations of candy-like memes that appeal to our pride.