

On Being Tenacious and its Limitations

This document is posted under the banner *Essays Related to the Early Church*. Reason? Simply because there's more room here.

Why single out this topic? No planning was involved, at least on the conscious level. As far as I recall, it stems from several discussions with a friend well versed in the thought of Carl Jung. Although I have a cursory knowledge of his ideas, these discussions had been and continue to be more informative than I could have imagined at the outset. Although I was learning much, on an unconscious level something deeper was at work. No doubt about that. I had no direct proof as to what was causing this new experience. However, I could tell it was an acquisition of knowledge on the experiential level not generally known nor discussed. The key difference? I'd say it was the emergence of a certain dumbness that had come over me. Clearly it was not of my doing. In such a state one is fully attentive to all the details of the discussions but in a strange way oblivious to them.

While you grasp each and every word with great care, some force indeed is numbing you on a deep level—like being anesthetized—in order for an operation to be carried out for your benefit. That's the best way I can describe it for now.¹ As for the apparent loss of recalling the content that had emerged in the discussions, somehow it comes back at you later on without losing a thing. So in the meanwhile you're carrying on as you do normally while something...someone...seems to have stepped in quietly and taken charge. Again, this is largely beyond my comprehension. Instead of experiencing unease at no longer being in the driver's seat, you find yourself in the process of being freed up. You don't have to bother being on the alert at all times which is quite exhausting. The more this take over, the freer you are. Go figure.

The way our minds operate (surely more than the conventional understanding of what we call mind is involved) produces some pretty strange things as we all know. Chief among them—and this continues to be central to most of our discussions—goes by a Jungian concept called a complex. From my unprofessional point of view it seems that in the literal sense a complex embraces a number of components that contribute to how we react in a given situation. That's distinct from giving a response which implies something measured and thought out before being manifested. For the most part complexes lay dormant but are activated, for example, by external circumstances. I guess having memories of some past event triggers the same thing.

¹ There comes to mind the interaction between Socrates and Meno in the dialogue named after the latter: "You seem in appearance and in every other way to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb" (80a). Got to love this, really. It represents a wholly different type of knowledge that needs to be fleshed out.

The time it takes for a complex to spring into life is virtually non-existent. However, time in this instance operates on what we'd call a nanosecond level or something akin to it. While my friend and I were talking recently, indeed I felt more than one of these complexes pretty much jump into the field of my attention. The same applied to my friend. They were activated by different aspects of our discussions and could have taken greater root in our awareness if we let them do so. However, we continued talking, so that pretty much squelched their coming to fruition. The key point is to become aware of them or let them fade as in the just mentioned discussion. More on that later, for it's key.

Bringing to awareness just one of our complexes during the course of a given day can be a challenge, given the memories it evokes. Add another (and God forbid, even more), and their combined force would disable us on the spot, casting us into a depression hard to escape. Because a given day is filled with the run-of-the-mill distractions, we don't pay much attention to these complexes. That means for the most part they are diluted. One could almost say that distractions are a blessing keeping the complexes at bay. It might be better to say that yes, one or more complexes might emerge but on a manageable scale.

One example where things are very different is at night. At that time we're completely vulnerable to just about every complex imaginable. We can almost visualize them jostling to get into position—who will be first—as they get ready to take a swipe at us, one after another. Even to conceive of them this way is a step in the right direction as to defanging their influence. On the morrow we recall their assault, and with the benefit of the daylight hours remark at how silly we had behaved, caving into what we now regard as fleeting phantoms. Indeed, night and day are two different animals, so different that it's hard to see how they are connected. Still, we must give them close attention because indeed they are bound together. More on this will follow.

As for the subject matter of this article...tenaciousness...it has to do with one of a multitude of potential complexes within us. For the life of me, I can't recall how or why I had singled it out. Actually the exact nature of the complex turns out to be quite secondary. One could say that a complex is a complex is a complex. In other words, despite being vastly different, they all have the same quality of compulsiveness and suddenness. Sometimes when one or more complex is activated they overwhelm us so much that they harden our outlook on life. Obviously that's undesirable, even dangerous, should we stay under their spell. We become fixated or better, rigid and unbending as a piece of wood. Everyone else is a threat in their attempt to bend us. In actuality they're not doing this. We're the one's thinking this way and lash out at them.

When a complex controls us we know it full well because it differs from normal experience or going along with the normal course of events. That, of course, includes our thoughts. The main difference? We're caught in a certain streamlined, almost slick way of comporting ourselves. That is to say, under the spell of a complex everything smooths out without wrinkles in our thought patterns and spills over to how we move about physically. We comport ourselves with a unique combination of rigidity and its opposite, smoothness, which ironically is marked by a certain elegance. Now we are on auto-pilot, at the service of something greater than ourselves. A not totally inaccurate example would be showing subservience to an all-powerful ruler. Take one step out of line, and we pay for it dearly. And so everything is coordinated to one end—the complex at hand—which means our behavior is endowed with a simplicity that can be envious but in actuality is to be deplored and indeed, cautioned against pursuing.

At the same time we feel we're not acting according to the way we should or the way that seems natural to us. An external observer might pick upon a certain coldness operative in our lives that hadn't been present beforehand. Rigidity isn't quite appropriate because that infers with our movement, making it jerky. Still, there's something bordering on the unnatural about it. What gives us away? We lack spontaneity and a decreased sense of humor. Also we're more prone to bark out at anyone who disagrees with us. Anyone or anything that doesn't comply with our rigidity is a waste of time and energy. If a person knows us fairly well, he'd say that we're acting out of fear...not so much in an overt fashion but more from a threat of being called on the carpet for not sticking to a given plan.

The way a given complex plays out may assume the form of a disguise. It isn't one that we assume willingly but one to which we have bound ourselves freely. We enjoy the inner straightness it offers because we find ourselves protected against things and people that have troubled us earlier. Now we no longer have to worry. We work under the shadow of the complex, giving it our allegiance and doing so gladly. Furthermore, the complex puts to rest our conscience because we have no fear or hesitation that we're doing something inappropriate. Our reward? Something we've wanted a long time, freedom from doubt. This I'd say is the major attraction of a complex (if we could put it as such) and why we fall into an unswerving pattern of behavior. While things may go well for a time, it isn't long before we have an inkling that we're not comporting ourselves naturally, that we're acting out something that's for some reason or other that has possessed us.

What gives rise to this questioning of such an apparently ideal state? It's too perfect, has all the answers, and runs the risk of making us into a boorish know-it-all. The problem is that such a person doesn't realize what's evident to other people. So when you discover it, you feel quite embarrassed and want to crawl under the nearest rock. All the advantages we think we've acquired disappear at once while we're left holding the bag. Should we

choose to learn from this painful experience, we see more clearly that all our energy has been put at the service...actually wasted...with regard to one or more complexes. Other persons certainly have theirs, but our stand out almost blatantly by reason of the artificiality we display.

It might be better to call this control the result of having been hijacked which often we're unaware of. Such a life governed by straightness and purposefulness follows all the rules like everyone else. Nothing is out of order as far as conformity to conventional laws and customs. It's the rigidity with which we do it that stands out. A hijacked person knows he's been taken over by external power but may not be able to put his finger on it. In fact, he may think it a kind of Godsend insofar as he doesn't have to worry about straying from the path he feels is the right one.²

However, being hijacked, just as when it happens in a dramatic fashion, means being held as a prisoner³. One does what is demanded by those in charge or suffer the consequences. That friend of mine who I had mentioned and is responsible for getting this article off the ground gave the example of someone we both know, a fellow who goes about his daily business but is quite tenacious in certain areas. We focused on this because he displays a certain compulsiveness when falling under this complex. The benefit is that it gathers up all one's energies and puts them at the service of a given project. It helps you through thick and thin. On the other hand, this tenacity can spill over to areas where it isn't called for. Despite the best of intentions, it can cause havoc because of a lack of boundaries.

So it seems the trick is to know when and where we're tenacious and keep it within its proper parameters. Knowing more precisely these parameters might sound rather vague, but we're fully aware of when, for example, tenaciousness is effective and when it is not. It's something that comes naturally. Like any other complex, this one has degrees of intensity. Regulating that too is important, determined by the situation in which we find ourselves. It's not unlike controlling heat on a stove, not too little and not too much. The best part is that we don't learn to do this on our own. It comes by way of example, a lot being imparted indirectly by people around us. That might be the best and in the end, the only way to describe how we can ease ourselves out from a given complex. If this insight isn't present we can be pretty certain that we've been hijacked. If we were in the conventional sense, we'd feel trapped. However, we feel more regulated than trapped. The best approach then is to admit it in one way or another.

² I'm not sure if we can parallel this with the so-called Copenhagen Syndrome where a captive or hijacked person sympathizes with the one responsible for his condition. Anyway, I throw it out for consideration.

³ The main difference in being hijacked here is that willingly we submit to the demands presented to us. i.e., we're held captive but freely so.

When under the influence of a given complex, a good way to start disentangling ourselves from its grip is to objectify it in terms of an appropriate image instead of looking in at oneself. If we don't, we're like a deer caught by its stare in the headlights of a car. For example, we can stop thinking of ourselves as being tenacious at this moment and not so at another time. Like any other complex, being tenacious means we don't have to be such 100% of the time. If we were, the energy would be so intense we wouldn't survive the day. Like all things, a complex needs to be modified...regulated...and this idea of coming up with dividing the time between when we're tenacious and when we're not is one step in the right direction. At least it puts the break on the complex. Once this is done, the image can be applied which takes attention away from the intensity at hand.

As for the image itself, one way to do this is to think in terms of boundaries such as a square. Perhaps this is the best image of them all because it has four sides and allows us to situate some "stuff" in this corner and other "stuff" in the other three. We do this from the position of the center and thus have a commanding view of all four corners. A nice feature of the square is that it's portable. We bring it along with us while projecting its form within our field of vision, just enough to make us feel comfortable. If pressure from the outside is against one side, the other three work together to compensate. These four sides give the square the ability to expand this way or that which means I can have an image of the same complex (let's keep with tenaciousness) quite different from yours...and yours from the next person and so forth down the line.

Most people consider a circle the most perfect form by reason of it's overall smoothness and lack of points that stick out here and there because the circumference is equidistant from the center. By reason of this attractive feature, you'd think we would opt for that image. However, when applied to our talk about a complex it contains a fatal flaw, one we must avoid at all costs. Being hijacked means we're caught in...well...something circular by nature from which we can't escape. A circle is round (obviously) which means it's slippery, hard to get hold off as well as to pin down. Such is what happens when we're hijacked. We're forced to go round and round chasing one thought or image to the exclusion of all others. It's so total that we do everything in life influenced by it ⁴. We get up in the morning, go to work, pray, go on vacation and everything else under the sun while being entrapped. The complex of tenaciousness at hand fits perfectly with this. The faster we go around, the tighter our grip becomes. Those instances when tenaciousness had been applied with beneficial results now tyrannize each and every part of our lives.

⁴ My friend whom I had mentioned likened this to a person being asleep yet wide awake. He or she does everything throughout life totally asleep. Apparently he got this from somewhere else, but I forget the source. Anyway, I like it but refine it by inserting the term sleepwalking throughout one's entire life.

This freely accepted hijacking (a paradox if ever there was one) starts off with an appealing image, else we wouldn't latch onto it. Once we do, we're on a roll...literally...and cannot stop. The way the images latch on to us has a lot to do with speed. They start off slowly which is their appeal. Being hijacked isn't at all like the images we've come to associated with it. If we realized this at the get-go, we'd overcome our hijackers with relative ease and move on. However, rarely this is the case. Just now I used the plural "images" which is fair enough. Because the complex is so single-minded, it'd be better to use the singular "image" which better suits our current situation. After all, the material presented here is done in an unprofessional manner but hopefully in a way that can speak to persons reading it.

So if we were flesh and blood hijackers, which weapon would we choose, a square or a circle? As noted already, the latter sounds more attractive but turns out to be otherwise. It's more difficult to take a square by force instead of a circle by reason of its four sharp points. A complex would have a much harder time swallowing, if you will, this type of structure than something round. A round object would go down far more easily not unlike swallowing a pill. Also a square (the same is applicable to its cousin, a rectangle) is the essential shape of a building block. It can be stacked, layered, fitted this way or that to create a larger structure. That means a square has more a mind of its own.

Obviously these two images are pressed out to the max simply to bring out a mode of behavior that impacts us all, that is, through the operation of a given complex. At the same time both are not found in nature. The square stands out by reason of its artificiality and the circle by reason of its smoothness and common image of perfection which really doesn't exist. Never will you find round (circular, yes) objects in nature. It's just as artificial as a square. The most natural shape of them all is an ellipse or better, the shape of a pear, bulging at the bottom and rounded off midway towards the top. Every single natural object has this shape: rocks, trees, drops of water, planets and galaxies. It's a natural shape appealing to the eye which combines weightiness and that which is less weighty. An ellipse can take buffeting far more easily and bounces back to its original shape.¹

Another image we can adopt is a border span such as the one between night and day. We want those images that are appealing, not harsh, to counter the near universal control put on us by a complex. Twilight is better than thinking of day and night as too sharply divided halves careening from one to the other. This would become quite unsettling because we'd be doing it not just once but twice a day, night-to-morning (dawn) and evening-to-night (dusk). That's how we'd view the difference should we be fully hijacked as by the complex

¹ This is expounded at great length in **A Different Twist to Conceiving Spiritual Advancement** also on this homepage.

of tenaciousness. In other words, I'd be tenacious holding on to one here and not tenacious with the other. Circumstances dictate which one would fit, not my tenaciousness. Such a sharp alteration is a sure ticket to a mental breakdown.

Such is where the boundary of twilight comes to the rescue. Not only that, it happens at two very appropriate times which are in accord with how we've come to live. We rise in the morning and go to bed in the evening. Everyone in the world does that. It's so basic and done with such consistency that barely do we give it a second thought. Even if one's schedule is opposite this such as working at night, the two boundary times still determine that person's behavior. Even astronauts observe a circadian rhythm in order to maintain order in their lives.

And so we have that fundamental distinction between night and day sandwiched in between with two twilights. Except for living right at the equator (so I understand), there's a gradual transition from night into day and day into night. Should you be aware of that throughout a given day, you'll become sensitive to the hours of a given day tending toward night and the hours of a given night tending toward day. Perhaps this is why the image of a watchman has had and continues to have a certain appeal. He looks forward to the dawn with delight and to sunset with anxiety. This, of course, is within the larger picture of the earth's rotation. Both allow you time to adjust and get ready for the other half of the twenty-four hour cycle. Obviously there's no clear-cut distinction between the two halves, more a gradual transition where the passage of time is constant. Then we can throw in a shorter or longer span of day or night, given the season.

Honing in on this most basic of all rhythms is a great image that can save us from being imprisoned by a complex. It's comprised essentially of movement which is constant which makes it more difficult to be hijacked. And if we allow ourselves to be so taken over, awareness of this constant movement makes it easier to shake off. We owe it to ourselves to do this. While it may not have direct impact on other people, in some mysterious way it's bound to do so in a positive fashion. That's a sure-fire insight impossible to shake.

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