

Ask A Genius 71 – The Soul and Consciousness (2)
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January 27, 2017

Scott: I wanted to get something more from that. That is, the deep characteristics or the traits of an individual would be, as you define it, aspects of the soul or the soul as a whole. So, vices and virtues can be expressed through that definition.

Rick: Yes, when you look at Obama – Liberals, at least based on approval ratings, think of him as a good guy. He is less transparent, though, more enigmatic than President Trump. So, you'd have to make more guesses about Obama's deep personality traits.

Scott: What would you consider his vices and virtues?

Rick: An eagerness to or a tendency to see the goodness to people. To some people, and possibly to me, it led to him being played by the Republicans, who during the 21st century have become willing to practice politics with deep cynicism.

Scott: What about historical figures, e.g. politicians, scientists, artists, and activists?

Rick: Let's look at Einstein, he had some transparent aspects. Public figures tend to want to promote certain personality traits. They want to advertise their souls, without calling it that, as having certain characteristics. Einstein liked to publicize his, and this is not a deep characterization of Einstein, his childish carelessness about worldly behaviour. He turns to somebody at a big dinner and says, "I'm not wearing socks." Apparently, when he was younger, he decided that socks weren't worth it because socks get holes in the toes and decided if you don't have socks then you don't have that problem.

That tells you more about his soul than him telling somebody that he doesn't wear socks. One is the soul indicator. Another is the PR (public relations). But there are a bunch of quotes about Einstein's belief in an aesthetic determinant in deciding theories of the universe. That when you're trying to understand the universe, if you come upon a theory that is elegant and beautiful, then it pretty much has to be true because God doesn't work in ugly, clunky, ways.

So, the sense of the beauty in mathematical physics might be an aspect of Einstein's soul. An expectation that whatever explains the universe is going to be beautiful, simple, and elegant. Anyway, your soul can be seen as your deeper personality characteristics independent of daily trivia. A long-standing, well-established, not just specific beliefs but, rhythm behind those beliefs, which, I believe, all of those things, like daily trivia, can be seen within our information map. Beliefs can be seen in your information map teased out of it, somehow, and then even the rhythm behind your beliefs - the deep, deep themes to what you think - can probably be teased from out of your information map.

However, maybe with more difficulty, perhaps represent arrangements of information within your information map at different scales, daily trivia might be more localized in terms of the processing. In terms of the significant beliefs, they may have more complicated and larger

structures, and the themes behind your beliefs might have larger structures still, or I might be making the wrong analogy there, where the deeper and larger your beliefs then the more mental landscape it will have to encompass.

The difference between consciousness and the soul is consciousness at any moment can focus on gross toes while the soul is deep rhythms of belief. More profound principles of what makes you you. It is more profound to describe me as somebody who wants to think about the deep structure of the world, but often finds himself distracted. That is a deeper description of me rather than to describe me as somebody who picks a zit that may or may not be there and picks at his toe fungus.

(Laugh)

Scott: Derivative from the soul comes vices and virtues. They represent deeper aspects, consistent long-term aspects, of an individual's beliefs, behaviours, and thoughts.

Rick: Yes.

Scott: What can, in general, be termed vices, and what can, in general, be termed virtues within this definition because the main principles that are consistent across cultures, across time, basically amount to the Golden Rule?

Rick: Yes, I would think that most things that would come across as deeper virtues would be a love for others, which is the Golden Rule. It is that you can't practice the Golden Rule unless you have a model of what you yourself like, and then you have an idea of other people, and that they would like the same thing, at a deep level. You see that people since Trump became a political force have been looking for signs of good in Trump.

Many people find it. I watched inauguration coverage on CNBC, which is the stock market channel. On CNBC, they are talking about the good in Trump. That he will set America free. That as a self-driven businessman that he understands business. That he understands how to make America a good place to do business, so that the algorithm for finding good in Trump is from selfishness comes an understanding of the self, particularly the business self, that when bestowed upon another sets America free.

Whether or not that is how it really plays out with Trump, there's some Golden Rule there. Anytime you hear the statement that includes "with a heart of gold." Often, you hear "hooker with a heart of gold."

(Laugh)

That means somebody with a harsh mercantile, mercenary, immediate presence, and if you scratch them at all then you find a deep tenderness under the crusty exterior, and I'd say the search for goodness among people is a search to find people's better angels. Even when, they wear their worst angels on their sleeves, as Trump does. Trump supporters see the crusty exterior

as speaking truth and speaking from a less bullshit-mediated appreciation of people, regular people, than normal politicians.

Anyway, I agree with you. The deepest virtues tend to be linked to The Golden Rule, and you can link The Golden Rule to order and persistence in the world. That we're creations of a world of increasing order. Evolved beings are creations of long-term increasing order or, at least, long-term maintained order, and forces that favor that are seen as virtuous. Cthulhu, the soul destroyer, the soul sucker, is a deep expression of the violation and destruction of order.

It is a fearsome thing. Most, I'd say, horror movies involve destruction or corruption, certainly slasher movies. You take human bodies and the minds and personalities that those bodies support, then you hack those up. That is deep unfixable destruction. It is scary. Forces of order, the maintenance of order, are seen as virtues. Forces of destruction are seen as vices. Satan is a corrupted angel. A force of good turned bad. Everything boils down. We've evolved to want to persist, to want to survive, to want to carry on our values. If not through us, then through succeeding generations and society in general. Virtues are associated with order and the passing on of beliefs, and vices are destructive.

Scott: I can envision two separate diagrams. One label, soul, that bifurcates into virtues and vices, then those divide into various things relative to The Golden Rule, and then another one would be separate, to clarify. It would be The Golden Rule like a bubble with various branches coming out of it.

Rick: Yes, I keep coming back to the election. You have different models of competing goodness. People who supported Hillary supported the idea that good is accomplished through the political establishment, through an incremental at least series of social improvements across the past 8 years, e.g. gay marriage, increasing number of people being insured. These are imperfect, but incremental steps, to a greater good. A more all-encompassing good. On the other side, that entrenched political structure is seen as highly corrupt and is needing to be overthrown by a different order. An order that supports traditional values.

It will sweep away increasing corruption as seen with the purported high costs of Obamacare, and with the creeping corrosion of anything goes in terms of sexual behavior. But it is still competing interpretations of goodness, and trying to increasing goodness in the world. And it is also associated with the persistence and increase of good. That each side sees itself as being associated with a force for gradually, if not suddenly, increasing good across history, which means that I've heard a lot of arguments that boil down to Utilitarianism. The greatest good for the greatest number.

Scott: John Stuart Mill, who followed Jeremy Bentham, considered utilitarianism following the Nazarene. They are synonyms in a way.

Rick: A Republican congressman on MSNBC argued a weird take on greatest good for the greatest number. He said instead of trying to get the most people covered by insurance. We should be trying to get the most people the best care. So, you don't count by how many people are covered. You instead devote your resources to making sure that sick people get the best care,

even if that means fewer people are covered. He was weighting a different aspect of the system in a way that I thought was bullshit, but somehow he was saying by, in my mind, cutting a bunch of people loose that you somehow have more resources to give better treatment to the people who need it. It just seemed to be just transparent excuse-making. Who knows, we'll see how everything plays out.

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