



Psychotic Paradox Proposed

James F Welles*

Department of Psychology, USA

*Corresponding author: James F Welles, Ph.D, P. O. Box 17, East Marion, New York, 11939, USA, Tel: 954-531-5392; Email: jwelles103@aol.com

Received Date: February 21, 2020; Published Date: March 12, 2020

Opinion

In terms of intellectual development, human behavior may be viewed as adaptive and mala-daptive. In the short run, it may be adaptive in that it can help an individual adjust to his own cultural values by leading him/her to accept any blatant contradictions between the real and ideal. As a mechanism for short-term adaptation, stupidity is an example of the "Neurotic Paradox" which encourages behavioral which is subject to immediate positive reinforcement while the long-term im-pact is likely to be negative [1]. A concomitant drawback is that immediate errors may be difficult to transcend long term [2] if the short-term decision sets one off on a deleterious path which then becomes more difficult to overcome later. Addictions or commitments to "Pleasure" could be examples of this principle of life and learning [3]. Honoré de Balzac noted, "Pleasure is like certain drugs, to continue to obtain the same result, one must double the dose, and death or brutalization is contained in the last one" [4]. Deficit spending by the government constitutes a cultural example of this principle.

While such conduct may be adaptive in aiding a person to fit into his/her cultural environment, it may be in the long run maladaptive, as it reduces innovations and positive criticism of one's immediate environment. People fit in with the social group, but it loses the capacity to respond to the contingent surroundings as individuals forego their personal standards, ideals and insights to conform to standard values for social standing and acceptance.

Of course, the bottom line, long-term net effect of the neurotic paradox is negative, but its presence cannot be understood without recognition of its role in helping people adapt to their immediate, short-term social situation. Thus, it

becomes clear how there can be so much dysfunction around although it is, in the long run, maladaptive. Survival within the system is promoted if one is disposed to accept the system's stupidities. Also, short-term survival of the system (institution, group, etc.) is promoted through enhanced social cohesion. However, these immediate gains are countered by the long-term loss of induced inefficiency of information processing. Our cultural life is really a very human trade off among these three dependent features:

1. Objective, rational, logical processing of information.
2. Psychological gratification and self-image of the individual.
3. Group cooperation and social cohesion [5].

With the qualification of arbitrariness in mind, it should be noted that most people who find maladaptation in others judge efficiency of processing information and usually do not even consider the emotional and social dimension of decisions affecting individual and institutional life. Accordingly, what might be regarded as stupidity may in fact be a healthy, short-term compromise with psychic satisfaction and group cohesion? Real dysfunction develops when one factor (information processing, psychic comfort or social cohesion) disrupts the others.

Let us propose the Psychotic Paradox as a psycho/cultural mechanism of delayed gratification which blocks short-term, immediate presumed advantages for the sake of possible rewards to be gained later—as when a worker goes on strike, thus sacrificing the all but tangible reality of the next paycheck for the sake of a potentially bigger one in the future. Corporation founder Walter Chrysler personified this principle: He was always willing to accept a short-term risk for a long-term payoff [6].

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