

Episode Fifty-Eight - The Mind's Direct Receipt of Images

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The answer to that isn't obvious and I'd claim nobody fully knows. Here's a start:

- Around five generations after once crossing-in a wild animal into a pet breed, the offspring will usually be considered a “pet” again. After 20 generations (of selecting only tamest specimen to continue breeding) around a third of foxes are domesticated to a dog-like level, after 30 generations 3 of 4 will be dog-like. Women in Athens married at the age of around 14, women in Sparta around the age of 20. Even when we're generous and award 30 years per generation, that still makes 66 generations in the past 2000 years, or more than twice the generations needed to turn wild foxes into pet-like, dog-like creatures. To sum up: Both the genetic and epigenetic influence on the psyche could be quite considerable over such a long time. (Yes, “quite considerable” is vague, but it's hard to put a number on it: How about “100 Standard Considerability Units”? Is that a lot? Well, it is certainly considerable! 😊).
- The condition of the mother, the gestational environment plays a role in later development.
- Microbiome and nutrition play a major role, both [short](#) and [long](#) term.
- Apart from nature (genetics, ...), experiences are also culturally inherited (nurture).
- Early experiences (especially up to the first beginnings of puberty) play an especially big role.
- [Language itself](#) is an important factor (think of [Newspeak](#), the influence of propaganda, the influence of framing, how different cultures view things differently).

With so many variables at play, what are the chances that you would, in fact, still “have a strong tendency to have a similar way of thinking”? What's more, the ancient times were comparatively violent, and transgenerational trauma transmission is strong: “Researchers typically find an intergenerational transmission rate [of Intimate Partner Violence and Child Maltreatment] of 30%”, says the APSAC Handbook On Child Maltreatment (page 172 of the 2011 version; a bit outdated, but not much will have changed with that number, because this topic has been actively researched since at least the early 1980s). Even nightmares of traumatic events are passed on somehow.[1]

At any one time, around 0,3% of the general population is affected by schizophrenia. This makes it one of the rarer mental disorders, which isn't very surprising, because it is very detrimental to survival, not just of that one individual, but of the entire hunter-gatherer tribe.[2] Schizophrenic delusions are characterised by hyper-meaning, by seeing meanings in meaningless things, by seeing associations between unrelated things: “Why did you take two

sugars – Julia only takes one sugar with her tea! Who are you and what have you done to my friend?!” It is also characterised by impaired reality-testing (lack of asking oneself: “Is what I just thought even possible physically, logically and realistically?”). You can imagine it quite like living in a nightmare, in which you are paranoid and your mind connects unrelated things to scare you. However, the ancient Greeks and Romans weren't erratic, delusional and irrational. Neither were they floridly schizophrenic, nor did they suffer the negative symptoms of schizophrenia: a deep emptiness, in which “everything is missing” (lack of will, speech, emotion, desires, ...).

Another feature commonly thought of in the context of schizophrenia is “hearing voices”: some (but not all) schizophrenics hear voices, which – and this is important – they localise as coming from the outside world[3] and which transport irrational, delusional contents/commands. These are called Schneiderian first-rank symptoms. The ancient texts tell us about voices, but those voices aren't irrational or delusional. Those voices do influence the person hearing them, but they don't effectively remote-control that person, even injecting new thoughts or erasing their own thoughts (which is quite possible in acute schizophrenia). The ancient texts also hint sometimes that those voices appear as a 4th category of their own: 1. voices of other humans, 2. the voice of one's own thoughts, 3. voices imagined in the mind's ear (auralisation; like pictures imagined in the mind's eye (visualisation)), and 4. voices which are not of other humans, not one's own thoughts, and not one's own imagined sounds, but which “appear in the mind somehow”. Such voices are consistent with and common in highly dissociative people.

Above 1% of the current general population is persistently(!) highly dissociative (three to four times more than are schizophrenic), and this number increases rapidly with traumatic experiences – to rephrase: it increases rapidly the more unpredictable and stressful the environment is. Even temporarily living in such an environment before the age of approximately eight can (but doesn't have to) lead to being persistently highly dissociative throughout adulthood.

I cannot quite imagine life in Ancient Greece – if I was born then, it would all be normal to me, so would I still consider certain things unsettling? Probably not? But perhaps more importantly: Why would I not consider those things unsettling anymore? What psychological measures would my mind take to remain so unfazed? Who is to say I might not, in fact, be dissociative and consequently “hear the muses”? (Similarly, what most people today experience as “being torn between two choices/positions/points of view” can present itself as quite literally an “inner argument” in dissociation.)

Let's contrast modern Western life with that in ancient times: Plutarch claims that Spartans would have cherry-picked babies, leaving those who appear weak to die. Even if that's exaggerated, it does set a certain stage. Spartans were explicitly raised to negate their personal boundaries entirely: their selves and their lives were nothing, Sparta was everything. Boys had to attend the agoge, a kind of primary and secondary school and military boot camp rolled into one. Bullying was encouraged, and the ritual whipping (the diamastigosis at the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia) of teenage boys was a very bloody affair. Being a woman, I

wouldn't have been sent to the agoge. However, what we today consider rape is common in the existing texts, even the "heroes" do it, the treatment of slaves was frequently transgressive, wars were common and routinely resulted in raping of women and children – and with all this going on, what it does to the victims is practically never mentioned at all. This either shows the men (our kind writers) did not consider it worth mentioning or it means the women did not consider it that bad – in either case, that points to a very different way of thinking, a different way of functioning even, and is hardly compatible with the idea that they were "just like we are today." To me, these and many other things – gladiator fights, human sacrifices, the brutal punishments exerted "for justice" – offer a glimpse towards a world which, for all its science, art and beauty, also contained an unimaginable amount of violence. Did children, in that world, routinely grow up with secure attachments, with warmth, being cared for mindfully, having their personal boundaries respected?[4] Was that world consistently comprehensible (predictable), manageable (non-overwhelming) and meaningful (pleasurable) to the children growing up in it? Somehow, I cannot quite imagine that.

Seeing one's brother or best friend ritually flogged to death at an altar laden with cheese (diamastigosis), while many visitors are present watching the spectacle – that in itself could hardly pass modern teenagers by without leaving a mark. So why should their minds still function "qualitatively the same"?

[1] This appears to be a quite readable introduction to that topic: <https://doctorsonly.co.il/wp-content/upl...ransmission.pdf>

[2] This might be why humans instinctively try to exclude the overly eccentric ("If she does that, who knows what else she might do, she might accidentally call the sabre-tooth tigers to our cave!").

[3] Stereo recordings are typically mastered such that, when listening to two speakers around three metres away and turned by about 30 degrees, a nice stage can be imagined. (A song with a particularly wide stereo field is the Beatles' [Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band](#), but I digress.) When listening with headphones the stage is no longer imagine in front of oneself, and instead is located "behind the eyes" and the music plays "inside your head", because the binaural crossfeed is missing: the brain requires certain naturally occurring acoustic effects, which alter the sound heard by both ears, to compute the location of the sound source. When both ears hear *exactly* the same (something which can only be achieved with modern day headphones), an unnatural edge case occurs, and the brain's sonar module locates those sounds "inside the head". This topic is somewhat analogous to stereoscopic vision (3D vision) requiring consistent-but-different input from both eyes (minor change in viewing angle): next time you play catch or frisbee, close one eye and see how well you do.

[4] Someone might object that this is asking too much, that to raise children like this sets the bar too highly; however, I'd argue that even in a hunter-gatherer situation children were with

their parents or immediate family almost all of the time, knew their place (in the group hierarchy), had secure attachments, were not subject to any grotesque and violent cultural practises, and as such I see no obvious reason why their personal boundaries would have been arbitrarily, needlessly ignored; so with some luck, the only unpredictable elements in their life were the weather and predatory animals – but not other humans. (Fossils show hunter-gatherers attacked each other, but that probably wasn't the norm, and I be surprised to learn their culture included arbitrary and pointless violence inside a tribe – they couldn't afford such waste.) To be more direct: Why would a hunter-gatherer have beaten their children? Why would they have neglected them? Even chimpanzees can literally rip an arm out of another species of ape they just killed in one moment, and peacefully cuddle and delouse their offspring the next moment. Compare that with the many artificial celebrations of violence in the ancient Greco-Roman world – whose childhood would be less overwhelming and less unpredictable? I don't know, but I can easily imagine that growing up 2000 years ago was no piece of cake, in which case those minds would have naturally developed their full psychological defensive capabilities, they would have been well-versed in dissociation, which is a natural, adaptive and powerful human capability lost in most modern humans – quite like vision remains lost if raised in darkness until a certain age ([critical period](#)).