

Cognitive Dissonance, Envy, and the
Psychological Roots of Anti-Liberalism

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Introduction

The classical liberal or libertarian¹ point of view is a minority one among both the general populace and among intellectuals. Many reasons have been put forward as to why a belief in the moral and consequential legitimacy of the state is maintained, even in the face of what liberals would say is a mountain of evidence to the contrary. In his classic work *Liberalism*, Ludwig von Mises claimed that “the root of the opposition to liberalism...does not stem from [] reason.” Rather, Mises claimed, this opposition stemmed from “a pathological mental attitude.” This attitude was comprised of envy and an inability to “endure life in its real form” that was coined the “Fourier complex” by Mises.² Mises did not discuss this concept other than in a few short pages in *Liberalism* but its implications are vast and need to be explored further. This paper will begin such an exploration by demonstrating how anti-liberal psychological tendencies are the result of cognitive dissonance and envy which lead to the development of pneumopathological thinking which in turn promotes even more anti-liberal tendencies.

This paper will expand Mises's concept of the Fourier complex in the context of Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism and pneumopathology. Both concepts are similar represent the same phenomenon. The concepts of envy and cognitive dissonance will be discussed and it will then be explained how they, as innate characteristics of human nature lead to the development of pneumopathological ways of thinking. The role cognitive dissonance plays in the anti-liberal manifestation of the pneumopathology will be explored, and finally some of the consequences and practical considerations of this premise will be explored.

¹ Henceforth simply identified as liberal.

² von Mises, 36

Fourier Complex and Pneumopathology

Mises did not elaborate much on his concept of the Fourier complex as an explanation for anti-liberal attitudes. However, there is a very clear similarity between Mises's concept of the Fourier complex and Eric Voegelin's idea of Gnosticism and pneumopathology. It should not be surprising that some similarity of thought can be found between the two thinkers (even though they certainly had significant differences)³ since Eric Voegelin was a regular at Mises's Vienna seminar.⁴ While Eric Voegelin uses different language, his description of Gnosticism and pneumopathology seems to be a slightly more detailed examination of the Fourier complex.

Mises frames the Fourier complex as being the result of a man's response to unfavorable circumstances.

Scarcely one person in a million succeeds in fulfilling his life's ambition... Plans and desires are shattered on a thousand obstacles, and one's powers prove too weak to achieve the goals on which one has set one's heart. The failure of his hopes, the frustration of his schemes, his own inadequacy in the face of the tasks that he has set himself—these constitute every man's most deeply painful experience—they are, indeed, the common lot of man.

In response to these unfavorable circumstances Mises says that man has two choices, he can “accept[] life for what it is and never allow[] himself to be overwhelmed by it” or he can “seek refuge for his crushed self-confidence in the solace of a ‘saving lie.’”⁵ For Mises the ideal answer is to accept reality for what it is and continue to live one's life.

³ See David Gordon, "The Fallacies of Voegelian Antiliberalism" for some of these differences.

⁴ Federicic, 1

⁵ von Mises, 36

In contrast, Mises claims that someone suffering from Fourier complex “cannot endure life in its real form. It is too raw for him, too coarse, too common. To render it bearable he does not, like the healthy man, have the heart to “carry on in spite of everything.” That would not be in keeping with his weakness. Instead, he takes refuge in a delusion. A delusion is, according to Freud, “itself something desired, a kind of consolation”; it is characterized by its ‘resistance to attack by logic and reality.’”⁶ To a person who develops Fourier complex, Mises claims that the idea of a “saving lie” serves two purposes in that “it not only consoles him for past failure, but holds out the prospect of future success” as well. The person suffering from the syndrome is able to hold out hope for future success because failure is not due to one’s own actions “but to the defectiveness of the social order” and they must cling to the “saving lie” even if it means sacrificing logic. “For life would be unbearable for him without the consolation that he finds in the idea of socialism. It tells him that not he himself, but the world, is at fault for having caused his failure; and this conviction raises his depressed self-confidence and liberates him from a tormenting feeling of inferiority.”⁷

When broken down the Fourier complex possesses three characteristics. (1) An inability to “endure life in its real form” due to the wish to avoid recognizing one’s “own inadequacies” in the face of reality. (2) A rejection of reality and instead choosing to “take refuge in a delusion” which takes the form of “a saving lie” that “one’s inability to attain the lofty goals to which one has aspired is not to be ascribed to one’s own inadequacy, but to the defectiveness of the social order.” (3) This rejection of reality in turn allows for utopian dreams that envision a society free of defects where “the socialist paradise will be the kingdom of perfection, populated by

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 39

completely happy supermen.”⁸

Mises describes Fourier complex in psychological terms calling it “a serious disease of the nervous system, a neurosis” and that it is “the mad product of a seriously deranged brain.”⁹ This is exactly how Voegelin characterizes his concept of a pneumopathology which he refers to as a “disease” and a “moral insanity” brought about by a gnostic state of mind.¹⁰ The result of the pneumopathology is the creation of a second reality. This second reality is an “imaginary reality” used to cover up actual reality and aspects of that reality the person suffering from the pneumopathology dislikes.¹¹ Voegelin’s understanding of Gnosticism can be seen as an expanded conception of Mises’s Fourier complex.¹²

To Voegelin the gnostic attitude has six characteristics. (1) A “Gnostic is dissatisfied with his situation.” Voegelin notes that this is not unusual or limited to Gnostics. (2) Gnostics respond to this dissatisfaction, not by finding fault in human nature (Voegelin notes that “Gnostics are not inclined to discover that human beings in general and they themselves in particular are inadequate”) but rather by claiming that “the world is poorly organized” and that if “something is not as it should be, then the fault is to be found in the wickedness of the world.” (3) Gnostics believe that “salvation from the evil of the world is possible.” (4) Thus Gnostics believe that the world can be fixed and that “from a wretched world a good one must evolve historically.” (5) This evolutionary change is possible because “a change in the order of being lies in the realm of human action, that this salvational act is possible through man’s own efforts.”

⁸ Ibid., 36-39

⁹ Ibid., 36

¹⁰ Voegelin, *The New Science...*, 225-226

¹¹ Federici, 233

¹² Henceforth the unified characteristics of the Fourier complex and pneumopathology will simply be identified as a pneumopathology with the understanding that Gnosticism is the belief that the order of being can be changed by humans as being part of a pneumopathology.

(6) The Gnostic must therefore work toward “the construction of a formula for self and world salvation” and this will be made evident in “the Gnostic’s readiness to come forward as a prophet who will proclaim his knowledge about the salvation of mankind.”¹³

Voegelin’s six characteristics of the gnostic mindset can be viewed as being an expanded examination of the characteristics of the Fourier complex. This similarity is especially true when it comes to Voegelin’s analysis of the process of rejecting reality and moving to justify a utopian program. Both Mises and Voegelin address the idea of deflecting blame for personal failure onto the world and the necessity for self-deception as being the beginning of a pneumopathology. According to Voegelin the self-deception includes “the prohibition of questions” that show the foolishness of a utopian’s construct. He cites several instances of Marx as responding to critical questions regarding the claim that man is an abstraction by simply saying “do not think, do not question me” and “that ‘for socialist man’—that is, for the man who has accepted Marx’s construct of the process of being and history—such a question ‘becomes a practical impossibility.’ The questions of the ‘individual man’ are cut off by the ukase of the speculator who will not permit his construct to be disturbed. When ‘socialist man’ speaks, man has to be silent.”¹⁴

Voegelin goes on to explain that the suppression of questions represents “a very complicated psychological phenomenon” where “a thinker who knows his construct will collapse” in the face of questioning does not abandon his “untenable construction” but instead simply “prohibit[s] such questions.” He goes on to then characterize Marx and other gnostic thinkers as being “intellectual swindlers” who know they are being swindlers.¹⁵ As noted above

¹³ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 297-298

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 262-263

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 264-267 This claim will be examined below in light of the concept of cognitive dissonance.

Mises claims that a person with a Fourier complex replaces reality and its disappointments with a fantasy world where all their dreams are able to come true. Voegelin analyses this phenomenon to a greater extent saying that the greatest concern of the gnostic is that “reality must be destroyed”¹⁶ since it “is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man’s creative power [it must be replaced] with a perfect and just order.”¹⁷

In summary, both Mises and Voegelin discussed the phenomenon of rejecting reality in order to build a new order where the problems and imperfections of the current reality will be eliminated. Both address a dissatisfaction with the current order of being due to an inability to accept it as it is. This in turn leads to a utopian line of thinking where man is capable of reforming reality as he sees fit and in turn leads to the development of pneumopathological thinking where man is not constrained by reality but can dominate and control it. This pneumopathological thinking often manifests itself in collectivist movements that are the antithesis of liberalism (such as communism, socialism, and fascism) and as a result of the abandonment of reason, reason cannot be used to persuade its adherents. The next two sections discuss phenomenon innate in human nature that contributes to anti-liberal dispositions and leads to the formation of pneumopathological tendencies.

Envy

Mises claimed that “resentment [envy] is at work when one so hates somebody for his more favorable circumstances that one is prepared to bear heavy losses if only the hated one might also come to harm.” Mises lists resentment and the Fourier complex as the two main forms of psychological opposition to liberalism.¹⁸ He discusses envy for only a single paragraph in

¹⁶ Ibid., 268

¹⁷ Ibid., 278

¹⁸ Von Mises, 36

Liberalism but does not underestimate its importance as a factor in an anti-liberal attitude. This premise was greatly expanded in the work of Helmut Schoeck in his book *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*. This section will analyze the phenomenon of envy and the ways in which it directly contributes to an anti-liberal attitude.

Envy, Schoeck claims, “is a drive which lies at the core of man’s life as a social being, and which occurs as soon as two beings become capable of mutual comparison.”¹⁹ It is important to emphasize that from Schoeck’s perspective envy is part of human nature, calling it “a basic human drive.”²⁰ Envy is distinct from jealousy which “is only directed against a definite transfer of coveted assets or their removal elsewhere, never against the asset as such. Envy very often denies the asset itself.”²¹

Envy is “the product of the feeling of impotence ‘which inhibits the striving after a possession that belongs to another. The tension between such striving and such impotence only leads to envy... when that is, owing to a delusion, the other with his possession is seen is experienced as the *cause* of our painful failure to have the possession.’”²² Schoeck cites Grimm’s German dictionary’s definition of envy as being ideal. “Today, as in earlier language, envy [*Neid*] expresses that vindictive and tormented frame of mind, the displeasure with which one perceives the prosperity and the advantages of others, begrudges them these things and in addition wishes one were able to destroy or possess them oneself: synonymous with malevolence, ill-will, the evil eye.”²³

Schoeck then breaks this definition down into three distinctive parts. (1) “Vindictive,

¹⁹ Schoeck, 3

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19

²² *Ibid.*, 23 Schoeck quoting Schiller

²³ *Ibid.*, 24 Schoeck quoting Grimm

inwardly tormenting, displeasure. These represent a feeling of aggression already conscious of impotence, so that from the start some of the aggression and a good measure of anguish and torment are somewhat masochistically turned back upon the subject.” He also notes the possibility that an envious man may actually want to destroy himself but is unable to begrudge that “others who enjoy life, or at least courageously endure it, should survive him.” (2) “Envy is emphatically an act of perception” that causes pain and discomfort in seeing other people to be better off or advantageous in some way. Schoeck dismisses egalitarian claims that envy can be eliminated by means of reducing inequality claiming that “anyone who has a propensity for envy, who is driven by that emotion, will always manage to find enviable qualities or possessions in others to arouse his envy.” (3) “One begrudges others their personal or material assets, being as a rule almost more intent on their destruction than on their acquisition.” This grudging feeling is traced to envious man’s own feelings of inadequacies and the realization “that in the long run it would be a very demanding responsibility were he to have the envied man’s qualities or possessions, and the best kind of world would be one in which neither he, the subject, nor the object of his envy would have them.”²⁴

Schoeck goes on to document numerous examples of envy in primitive societies taking the shape of “black magic” and its role as an example of the manifestation of envy in society. As Schoeck claims “during the witch trials of Europe those accused were precisely those persons who had somehow aroused the suspicion that they were envious and hence desirous of harming others. Gradually, however, the envious man himself became the accuser, the accused being people who were good-looking, virtuous, proud and rich, or the wives of wealthy citizen.” And that “primitive man is capable of asserting that another member of his tribe is only rich,

²⁴ Ibid., 24-25

powerful, a good dancer or hunter because he has gained by black magic something that should have belonged to his fellow tribesmen.”²⁵ The universality of this manifestation of envy can be seen in numerous “accounts of primitive peoples in all parts of the world offer a wealth of evidence as to the belief in witches and the practice of witchcraft.”²⁶ He then goes on to describe many examples of alleged witchcraft as envious behaviors in primitive cultures.²⁷

More important for our purposes, however, is Schoeck’s discussion of the ways in which envy serves as a barrier to the advancement of developing countries saying “the future, the only field where the fruits of a development are to be reaped, lends itself to a co-operative approach, to exploitation by men able to exchange and co-ordinate their ideas, and knowledge and desires. But this is conceivable only when fear of other’s envy, of his possible sabotage or malicious sorcery, has to some extent been overcome.”²⁸ This idea is quite an important aspect of the anti-liberal attitude as mentioned by Mises and is greatly expanded by Schoeck throughout his study. He cites the anthropologist Eric Wolf and his study of envy in “South American Peasant Cultures” to speak of institutionalized envy “or [how] the ubiquitous fear of it, means that there is little possibility of individual economic advancement” and “agricultural methods remain traditional and primitive, to the detriment of the whole village, because every deviation from previous practice comes up against the limitations set by envy.”²⁹ In contrast Schoeck claims “the more both private individuals and the custodians of political power in a given society are able to act as if there is no such thing as envy, the greater will be the rate of economic growth and the number of innovations in general.”³⁰

²⁵ Ibid., 40

²⁶ Ibid., 40-41

²⁷ Ibid., 40-56

²⁸ Ibid., 57

²⁹ Ibid., 58

³⁰ Ibid., 15

The manifestation of envy in modern society can be seen in many places as can be its negative consequences. These negative consequences are in many cases the coinciding of several different factors as is the manifestation of envy itself and will be examined as such in later sections. As analyzed by itself, however, it is quite clear that an envious disposition is certainly to the detriment of liberalism and this will be seen to be especially true when analyzed in the context of cognitive dissonance and pneumonopathologies.

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is defined as “a state of tension that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent.”³¹ There are numerous ways this phenomenon manifests itself throughout one’s daily life, in the beliefs they hold and the actions they take. However, a state of dissonance creates psychological discomfort and a person experiencing it must attempt to deal with it in some way. Leon Festinger, who wrote *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, one of the earliest works on cognitive dissonance described two basic human reactions to cognitive dissonance. “The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance” and secondly that “when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will likely avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.” The need to alleviate cognitive dissonance is no different than the need to alleviate hunger or any other such motivating factor. Therefore, “dissonance, that is the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right” and cognition is “any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one’s behavior.”³² Simply put cognitive dissonance is therefore the motivation to reduce

³¹ Tavis and Elliot, 21

³² Festinger, 3

dissonance or in other words it “is about how people strive to make sense out of contradictory ideas and lead lives that are, at least in their own minds, consistent and meaningful.”³³

Festinger lists three ways in which it is possible for someone to reduce dissonance. These are to change one’s behavior, to change one’s environment, or to add new cognitive elements. Changing one’s behavior is among the simplest ways to reduce dissonance and entails reacting to new information about reality as it is perceived. Festinger’s usual example was smoking. If someone smoked and valued their health, they would experience dissonance upon learning that smoking was detrimental to one’s health. If the person chose to reduce dissonance by changing one’s behavior, they would simply cease to smoke therefore eliminating the dissonance caused by the contradiction between smoking and wanting to be healthy.³⁴

Changing one’s environment can be more difficult but is often a viable solution. Festinger notes that it is often easier to change one’s social environment than one’s physical environment. Whereas changing one’s behavior in response to dissonance caused by new information means acting upon the new cognition, changing one’s environment on the other hand, means modifying one’s surrounding circumstances so that one’s cognition is changed. The example of this response that Festinger uses is a person who is often hostile to people surrounding himself with people who often elicit hostile responses. This then means that his responses are not unwarranted and therefore he does not experience dissonance. It is important to note, however, that the ability for someone to change his or her environment, either social or physical, is often limited. Therefore, “some means of ignoring or counteracting the real situation must be used” in order to change one’s cognitive element without first changing reality.

Festinger notes that at times this is impossible using the example of someone standing in the rain

³³ Tavis and Elliot, 22

³⁴ Festinger, 19

being unable to alter the cognition that it is raining no matter “how strong the psychological pressures are to eliminate that cognition” and that other times it can be easily achieved especially if a social pressure is present.³⁵

Finally, a person can introduce new cognitive elements that help to reduce the existing dissonance without eliminating it completely. This introduction can be done in several ways, one of which is by reducing the importance of existing dissonance. Festinger uses the example of a smoker reading literature that argues that smoking is not harmful or at least is not as harmful as other literature claims or may compare the risks of smoking to one’s health to the risk of injury when traveling in a car and conclude that smoking is safer than driving in a car. Alternatively, it may be possible to reconcile two dissonance causing cognitions. Festinger cites the example of the belief system of the Ifaluk society. It is a society-wide belief that people are good, yet children will exhibit violent tendencies. The Ifaluk reconcile this contradiction by introducing a new cognitive element, namely a claim that the children become possessed by “malevolent ghosts” that make the children to act violently.³⁶

Instead of eliminating or reducing dissonance it is also possible to avoid dissonance, or attempt to avoid dissonance, when attempting to form new cognitions. When seeking new information a person would tend to utilize only those sources of information, whether they be other people, books, or some other source, that would support the cognition in question and add to the person’s consonance.³⁷

When examining cognitive dissonance and its relevance to psychological causes for

³⁵ Ibid., 21 The role of social pressure will be explored in depth later in this paper.

³⁶ Ibid., 21-23 This use of a supernatural element to reconcile a dissonant belief is very notable when compared to Schoeck’s survey of witchcraft and black magic in primitive cultures as a way to justify failure and legitimize envy. This idea will be explored further later in this paper.

³⁷ Ibid., 29-30

opposition to liberalism there are two factors as discussed by Festinger that must be discussed. These are the voluntary and involuntary exposure to data and the role of social support in changing one's cognitions. Willingness to expose oneself to new information depends on whether or not the information is anticipated to create, or lessen dissonance and to what extent the magnitude of the dissonance has amassed. When there is very little or no dissonance, then factors other than whether or not the new information will cause dissonance will likely be the primary motivators. However, when dissonance is at moderate levels the person would likely take into consideration whether the new information will likely increase or decrease dissonance before deciding to expose themselves to it in order to strengthen consonance and reduce dissonance as much as possible. It is only when the magnitude of dissonance has built up enough to be close to surpassing the level of resistance to change that a person will likely expose themselves to dissonance increasing information. Once the level of dissonance has surpassed the level of resistance to change, then the person "will change the cognitive elements involved, thus markedly reducing or perhaps even wholly eliminating the dissonance which is now so great."³⁸

According to Festinger, when a person is involuntarily exposed to dissonance causing information he can respond in three different ways. He may have an "initial understanding of the propaganda message followed by a circuitous line of reasoning which ends in misunderstanding." This response means that a person experiencing dissonance from some new information would then attempt to separate his particular circumstance from the dissonance causing information and in the process come to understand the information in a way that does not cause dissonance. If the new information has been stated too clearly to permit misunderstanding then the person may simply dismiss the information, usually on a personal level, even while

³⁸ Ibid., 126-130

acknowledging its accuracy on a superficial level. Alternatively, a person may instead simply transform any new information so as to be compatible with his views and therefore not cause any more dissonance or in other words “issues presented in a frame of reference different from his own are transformed so as to become compatible with his own views.” Festinger speculates that people who have this reaction are likely to have already developed dissonance about whatever subject the new information is about and thus they would be more likely to have this instantaneous reaction as opposed to people who have the first two reactions who likely have not yet developed any significant dissonance about the subject of the new information.³⁹

As mentioned previously, positive social pressure can help to change or at least ignore certain cognitions and as it were help someone ignore reality. “The social group is at once a major source of cognitive dissonance for the individual and a major vehicle for eliminating and reducing the dissonance which may exist in him.”⁴⁰ In this context, however, the magnitude of the dissonance that arises when there is disagreement with others depends on two variables. The first is “the extent that objective, nonsocial, cognitive elements exist which are consonant with a given opinion, belief, or knowledge, the expression of disagreement will produce a lesser magnitude of dissonance.” So for instance if a person were to exclaim that it is a beautiful cloudless day and someone were to disagree and claim that it is grey and overcast, not very much dissonance if any at all would be created for the first person who is accurately ascertaining the reality of the weather. In contrast, it is noted that in situations where it is harder to ascertain the truth objectively (for instance the validity of a religion) then contrary views and opinions will lead to relatively more dissonance. The second variable is the number of people with whom one shares a belief or opinion. The more people who hold a belief in common with you, the greater

³⁹ Ibid., 134-136

⁴⁰ Ibid., 177

the amount of consonance that is built up and the less dissonance that is encountered when there is a disagreement.⁴¹

With these in mind Festinger lists three ways of reducing dissonance “stemming from social disagreement.” The first is to alter one’s own cognitions so that they are in alignment with the majority of other members of a social group. Festinger notes, however, that this only works if there is a clear majority and many people who hold the original cognition. The second way is by changing one’s social environment i.e., working to persuade other members of a social group to change their cognitions so they align with one’s own and thus removing the dissonance causing disagreement. Finally, dissonance can be reduced in a social setting if one is able to differentiate another person as not being “comparable to oneself.” The example Festinger uses is a person claiming the grass is green not experiencing dissonance when another person claims the grass is brown, because the first person is aware that the second person is colorblind.⁴²

Festinger notes a very important way in which the first way of reducing dissonance in a social setting can lead to a denial of reality. He uses an example of two people walking along when it starts to rain. Rather than acknowledging the rain, one of the people claims that it is not raining, but merely water blowing off the leaves of trees from a previous rain storm due to, for whatever reason, a strong dissonance with the cognition of it raining. If the other person was in tune with reality, they would likely reject this idea, however, if they were also experiencing strong dissonance then he would want to agree and deny that it is raining, and by doing so both people are able to reduce the dissonance created by denying that it is in fact raining. The more people who have a certain dissonance (in this case with rain) then the more people who will have an interest in denying reality in favor of the belief that water is blowing off of leaves and as a

⁴¹ Ibid., 178-179

⁴² Ibid., 181-182

result will result in an easier process of denying that it is raining due to social reinforcement and the resulting decrease in dissonance. “If everyone believes it, it most certainly must be true.”⁴³

This phenomenon also leads to another observation of the importance of mass proselytizing. The more people who agree with one’s cognition, the easier it is to reduce any associated dissonance with said cognition. This phenomenon is especially applicable in cases where the dissonance causing information is particularly strong and cannot be modified and the only way to reduce the dissonance caused by the additional information is to introduce new cognitive elements that reduce dissonance as discussed above. One of the ways to do this is to strengthen consonance by surrounding oneself with other people equally interested in reducing dissonance. As a result mass proselytizing is incentivized in order to reinforce consonance and reduce dissonance. The more people who come to hold some belief, the greater the reduction of dissonance will be (although in cases involving the denial of reality it cannot be reduced completely).⁴⁴

Seeing how cognitive dissonance can apply to any and all cognitions that one holds, it is quite understandable the ways in which it is applicable to anti-liberal cognitions. However, this paper is especially interested in the role that cognitive dissonance plays in the development of pneumopathologies and the resulting anti-liberal psychological tendencies rather than the regular everyday manifestations of cognitive dissonance occurring in an anti-liberal context. The next section shall explain the way in which envy and cognitive dissonance combine in order to create pneumopathologies and the resulting significant illogical responses in objection to liberalism.

⁴³ Ibid., 198-200

⁴⁴ Ibid., 200-202

Envy, Cognitive Dissonance, and the origin of Pneumopathologies

The previous sections of this paper have outlined and explained the phenomena of envy, cognitive dissonance, and pneumopathologies. This section will connect them all and demonstrate how pneumopathological thinking is the end result of the combination of envy and cognitive dissonance. Furthermore it will seek to demonstrate and explain the decidedly illiberal consequences of such thinking.

Claes Ryn, in his analysis of Rousseau, points out that imagination allows a man to be free of the bounds of reality and to envision himself in what he believes to be the perfect circumstances. Yet when faced with the harshness of reality, Ryn declares that “modern man would rather live in the world of his dream than in the world of practice.” And thus rather than face this reality he rejects it in favor of the product of his imagination where he imagines himself in the most perfect of circumstances.⁴⁵ However, man lacks the power to bring this imagined reality into existence.

Mises, Schoeck, and Voegelin speak of the root causes of illiberal attitudes as being in essence a personal lack of power or shortcoming having to do with one’s lack of ability to make some desire or goal a reality. Mises explains his Fourier complex as originating in a man’s response when “one’s powers prove too weak to achieve the goals on which one has set one’s heart.”⁴⁶ For Schoeck, recall that envy is “the product of the feeling of impotence”⁴⁷ “which inhibits the striving after a possession that belongs to another.”⁴⁸ Voegelin phrases the root of this phenomenon as “the Gnostic [being] dissatisfied with his situation.”⁴⁹ All three speak of

⁴⁵ Ryn, 14-17

⁴⁶ von Mises, 36

⁴⁷ Schoeck, 23

⁴⁸ Ibid., Schoeck quoting Schiller

⁴⁹ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 297

personal failure and inadequacy to affect a change or achieve some goal and the inability to accept the reality of that fact and therefore the need to deflect responsibility as being the root cause for what leads a man to reject reality.

Mises ascribes this rejection to the fact that such a man “cannot endure life in its real form. It is too raw for him, too coarse, too common” and in order to cope with this, he takes refuge in a delusion that reality can be overcome.⁵⁰ Schoeck describes this manifestation in how an envious person does not accept his own personal impotence as the source of his failure to possess some possession or trait, but rather that they accept a delusion that “the other with his possession is experienced as the *cause* of our painful failure to have the possession.”⁵¹ Voegelin’s Gnostic responds to his situation not by accepting that “it is we human beings who are inadequate” but that it is the world that is at fault.⁵²

This paper will refer to this feeling of inadequacy and corresponding need for deflection through delusion as envy. While both Mises and Voegelin refer to this delusion as specifically a rejection of reality, it can be said that the intermediary step is the one identified by Schoeck as being envy, namely that the undesired circumstances one finds oneself in is the fault of those who have what you desire and only possess it at your expense.⁵³ When envy remains unchecked, and is combined with cognitive dissonance, it is simple for it to continue on until it has developed into a pneumopathology.

It has been established that the seed of the anti-liberal mindset is a dissatisfaction with one’s own lack of power in the face of reality. When confronted with this fact one can accept reality as it is and take the necessary steps to work within it, or, in contrast, one may choose to

⁵⁰ von Mises, 36-39

⁵¹ Schoeck quoting Schiller, 23

⁵² Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 297

⁵³ This will be explained in more detail below.

ignore reality and attempt to overcome it. As has been noted above, everyone has disappointments in life and wishes that circumstances be different than they are and this necessarily creates dissonance. Man must explain why he is not able to live in his dream world. We will now analyze man's response to this fact through the lens of cognitive dissonance and trace the two different routes open to him in order to reduce this dissonance.

Firstly, the ideal response is for man to accept reality for what it is and that man must operate within its framework. Recalling Festinger, this response would be classified as changing one's behavior in the face of new information.⁵⁴ Take for example someone who wishes they were a millionaire. If the person in question was to take the approach of changing their behavior in the face of new information, they would then recognize that there are only two ways of acquiring wealth; creating value, or plunder. Assuming this individual is in a modern developed country⁵⁵ then it is likely that outright plunder will not be an obvious choice and that furthermore the superiority of mutually beneficial economic exchange will convince the individual that in order to achieve his goals he must operate within reality and therefore the fundamental laws of economics if he is going to achieve his goals. Furthermore, this means that he does not deflect the blame for his lack of millionaire status.⁵⁶

In contrast, the person desiring to be a millionaire can respond by adding new cognitive elements.⁵⁷ When someone opts to reduce their dissonance in this manner, it turns into the roots of an anti-liberal psychological disposition. What Schoeck's anthropological and historical

⁵⁴ Festinger, 19

⁵⁵ This is an important fact that will be explored later.

⁵⁶ It is important to clarify here the difference between envy and jealousy. If a man was not a millionaire as he result of being defrauded, having his wealth confiscated, be cheated, etc. etc. then this is an entirely different matter. Schoeck distinguishes jealousy as "the passionate endeavor to keep something that is one's own by right" (18). Rather this would be an accurate use of adding a cognitive element that is not a rejection of reality as will be discussed in the next section.

⁵⁷ Festinger, 21-24

surveys cited above have identified as the characteristic of human nature known as envy, is at the psychological level a propensity to add a new cognitive element in order to reduce the dissonance of perceived personal inadequacy. In this case, the new psychological element is that the man in question is not a millionaire not because of his own failings and inadequacies (both real and imagined), but from the fact that he is prevented from being a millionaire because someone else is already a millionaire. Here is where we can see the first roots of a pneumopathology developing.

It is important to take a slight detour to clarify an important characteristic of envy; namely that envy usually only occurs if the envious man is able to picture himself in the place of the person he is envious of. Hence, in societies with high social mobility (made possible by the capitalist system) there are not the same stratified barriers that can be found in say the caste system of India. Thus, in societies with a high degree of social mobility a person is not able to introduce the new cognitive element that he is able to in a highly immobile and stratified society. If he could do so, it would allow him to explain away their real or perceived inadequacies by saying that he is simply fulfilling his lot in life and things are the way they are. This explanation can be seen clearly when Schoeck claims “because it is comparatively easier to ascend into a higher class, or to descend from it, this social arrangement is unable to provide any conscious-relieving explanation for individual positions such as is possible in military or religious hierarchies.”⁵⁸

Returning to the envious man, it is here that we can see the beginning development of a pneumopathology. With the introduction of the new cognitive element he has now discovered an outlet for his dissonance. Unfortunately, that outlet is incorrect, since in reality it is in fact the

⁵⁸ Schoeck, 325-326 Further implications of this will be examined later.

envious man's inadequacies both real and perceived, that are the origin of the dissonance, not the fact that someone else possesses the desired items, or traits.⁵⁹ In doing so the envious man can now identify an outlet to further decrease his dissonance in the form of changing their environment by reducing inequality.

The pneumopathology is born in two parts, first when the envious man incorrectly diagnoses the cause of his dissonance, and secondly when he believes that through some kind of redistributive and often utopian program (the most common modern manifestation being egalitarianism) this dissonance will be entirely erased. Yet, there is an additional role envy plays in strengthening the pneumopathology. This role is what Schoeck calls "the guilt of being unequal."⁶⁰ He cites several sociological examples of ways in which people possessing more skills, or more wealth than their peers attempt to relieve their fear of being envious in different ways. He then explains that this fear manifests itself in a dissonance causing guilt.⁶¹ In order to reduce this dissonance the envied man again has several choices. He may work to change his cognition so that he does not feel guilty about whatever is envied about him, he may also work to change his environment in two ways. Depending on what is causing the guilt, he may sometimes simply abandon it especially if it is wealth. As Schoeck notes, this is seldom the course taken. Instead, guilt ridden people are prone to "instead of undertaking [] an 'Albert Schweitzer mission' oneself, one preaches from it from one's desk in London, Paris, Washington, or Zurich as a duty universally incumbent on all other Westerners, so that anybody who cannot himself be an Albert Schweitzer or a Peace Corp worker is ridden with guilt, and depreciates existentially whatever he is able to achieve within his life and his own field of activities."⁶² Thus the guilty

⁵⁹ Again here it is important to recall the difference between jealousy and envy.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 308

⁶¹ Ibid., 315-318

⁶² Ibid., 322

envied man seeks to change his environment by way of introducing a new cognitive element. This element is the possibility of an egalitarian society free from envy which is the change in environment. Schoeck notes that “I have no doubt that one of the most important motives for joining an egalitarian political movement is this anxious sense of guilt: ‘Let us set up a society in which no one is envious.’”⁶³

Thus, the dissonance born of real and perceived inadequacy that takes the form of envy and the response by those fearful of envy comes to hold all six of the characteristics of a pneumopathological attitude as outlined by Voegelin. Both the envious man and the man fearful of envy are dissatisfied with their situation. Rather than accepting human limits and their own limits in particular, they instead blame the organization of the world. They believe that this faulty world can be reorganized and that an egalitarian world is possible, and they claim they know how to achieve it. The envious man, and the man who lives in fear of envy have united to bring about an egalitarian future where envy shall be a thing of the past and all shall dwell in peace and contentment.⁶⁴

Cognitive Dissonance and the Anti-Liberal Manifestation of the Pneumopathology

Having established that envy leads to pneumopathological thinking, it must be recalled that pneumopathological thinking is defined as a madness and mental disease. There is a detachment and rebellion against reality in an attempt to bring into being something that is not

⁶³ Ibid., 325

⁶⁴ There are of course instances of anti-liberal gnostic movements that are not necessarily egalitarian in the broad sense, due to the racial component of their ideology, however they still exhibit these traits. The Nazi's were envious of the Jews, and internally there was egalitarianism among the ethnic Germans. This egalitarianism was part and parcel to their collectivist gnostic vision. However, since most of the current opponents to liberalism are egalitarians in the broader sense and not in the nationalist sense this paper will henceforth focus on them.

possible. Let there be no doubt that the entire premise of egalitarianism is a delusion. In both the economic and personal field, equality is neither desirable nor attainable. Not only that, but the various socialist schemes that will supposedly make the egalitarian utopia possible are themselves the product of the initial delusion and are stubbornly clung to in order to preserve faith in said delusion.

In Mises's words "Nothing, however, is as ill-founded as the assertion of the alleged equality of all members of the human race. Men are altogether unequal" and that "all human power would be insufficient to make men really equal. Men are and will always remain unequal."⁶⁵ This is clearly a slap in the face to those suffering from a pneumopathology who believe not only that through human power men can be made equal, but that this equality would be heaven on earth. Mises points to Trotsky as being the perfect example of this way of thinking claiming that under socialism "the average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise."⁶⁶ Rothbard discusses this extensively in his work *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature*, where he points out that "the age-old record of inequality seems to indicate that this variability and diversity is rooted in the biological nature of man. But it is precisely such a conclusion about biology and human nature that is the most galling of all possible irritants to our egalitarians."⁶⁷ He makes the pneumopathological nature of egalitarianism quite clear in another passage claiming that

the egalitarian revolt against biological reality, as significant as it is, is only a subset of a deeper revolt: against the ontological structure of reality itself, against the "very organization of nature"; against the universe as such. At the heart of the

⁶⁵ von Mises, 48

⁶⁶ von Mises, 39 quoting Trotsky

⁶⁷ Rothbard, 26 Also this irritation is clearly a reaction to unwelcome dissonance causing information.

egalitarian left is the pathological belief that there is no structure to reality; that all the world is *tabula rasa* that can be changed at any moment in any desired direction by the mere exercise of human will—in short, that reality can be instantly transformed by the mere wish or whim of human beings.⁶⁸

And in so discarding the nature of reality, the egalitarian paves the way for “the New Communist Man of the future [who] will be a superman, superhuman in his abilities to transcend nature” and even the belief that “once private property is abolished, man would become immortal.”⁶⁹

The pneumopathological nature of the anti-liberal opposition has now be clearly demonstrated; however, it is important to divide the anti-liberal opposition into two separate categories. Any observation of the general public clearly shows that they are not advocating for an overthrow of objective reality to usher in a new utopia. Rather it seems better to describe their pneumopathological tendencies as being largely rooted in ignorance of objective reality and due to their envy (or fear of being envied) they hold onto a vague picture of what they consider to be a better state of being. Yet, this delusional desire is more of a fanciful whim that is not really seriously entertained. Much like the modern younger person who sips a luxury coffee while using their iPhone to connect with their friends on Facebook will idly muse that they wish society could return to a (fictional) idyllic hunter gatherer past. Such people certainly do not generally act on such a belief and it is likewise true for their pneumopathological beliefs as well. Aside from opinionated discussions on social media and among friends and occasionally voting these beliefs are not acted upon with the same urgency as the second category of anti-liberals.

It seems likely that the majority of the population holds anti-liberal beliefs and is not

⁶⁸ Ibid., 33

⁶⁹ Ibid., 34

generally persuaded by reason, not because of the amount of dissonance stemming from their own perceived and real inadequacies, but rather from the consonance that results from agreeing with the majority and from avoidance of the dissonance that results when one disagrees with the majority as is explained above. This insight, then, means that the true obstacle in the way of liberal persuasion is for the most part massive group think and the ability for mass agreement to create reality defying consonance.

As noted above Festinger claimed that one of the important variables that play a role in determining the amount of dissonance or consonance created by social agreement or disagreement was “the extent that objective, nonsocial, cognitive elements exist which are consonant with a given opinion, belief, or knowledge, the expression of disagreement will produce a lesser magnitude of dissonance. Thus, where the content of the opinion concerns “testable physical reality,” there will be little dissonance created by social disagreement.”⁷⁰ Liberals must then ask themselves why do things that seem to be so plainly in reality and therefore clear and logical to them are not viewed the same way by the masses who instead believe all manner of economic and political fallacies. Festinger’s emphasis on “physical reality” is key here. Liberal principles that demonstrate the superiority of a free society are not as evident as say the weather outside, rather they are often based in both logic and history and require critical thinking and analyzing skills to understand them. It is here that the liberals are at a great disadvantage due to the state education system. The dangerous pneumopathological nature of those behind the philosophy of the state education system is made quite clear by John Dewey one of the most influential thinkers when it comes to American education when he claims that “I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set

⁷⁰ Festinger, 178-179

apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth. I believe that in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.”⁷¹ With such extreme Gnostics clearly suffering from a pneumopathology in charge of compulsory state education it is little wonder that the majority of the population is unable to think and reason clearly.

Thus, while the first group of anti-liberals is motivated more out of the cognitive dissonance that comes from straying from the majority opinion, the second group is much more dangerous. These are the people whose pneumopathology is extreme. They are driven to their anti-liberalism not by a simple desire to escape the dissonance that comes from non-conformity, but rather by their deep seated insecurities and the need to escape the dissonance they create. These are the true believers who openly acknowledge and speak of their desire to transcend the metaxy. These anti-liberals can also be differentiated by how they will act on their beliefs. In contrast to the average man who idly imagines a world better off without the capitalist system of free exchange, yet changes his behavior very little, the true believers by contrast actively drive for change. It is the true believers who become the prophets spoken of by Voegelin who lay out a path for the rest of humanity to follow.

These true believers seem to be most prone to be found in intellectual fields in developed countries and also it seems that many people who could be classified as falling into pneumopathology from the fear of envy and the resulting guilt. One explanation for this tendency can also possibly explain what separates the true believer from the average man going along with the crowd. Schoeck attributes some of the egalitarian backlash against the unprecedented prosperity of the last two centuries to be due in part to “the existence of social

⁷¹ Dewey, 9 A clearer example of attempting to immanetize the eschaton would be harder to find.

guilt, often of an existential character (many people ask themselves why they should be alive at all).”⁷² There is deep unease, and Schoeck speaks of how when speaking to people who are opposed to Western affluence “a short conversation is enough to detect in them a persistent, smouldering feeling: their own society, or Western society in general, does not suit them. They feel ill at ease because it is comfortable; and this is because not everyone is equally well or badly off, and because others are too well off.”⁷³ In other words people seem to think that “something simply *has* to be wrong *because* the times are so good.”⁷⁴

It seems, however, that the case can be made that in fact this existential guilt is more than simply the product of a cognizance of material inequality. Schoeck connects this guilt in part to people being “partly governed by these same archaic emotional complexes” that were the result of the fear of divine envy.⁷⁵ Yet, the existential component of this guilt that leads people to question their very own existence can be connected to a psychological phenomenon brought about by the unprecedented prosperity made possible by the industrial revolution and the capitalist system. Whereas previously most of the population was from the crib to the grave engaged in a life or death struggle for survival, that is no longer the case, thus the more intellectually inclined, and those who are in positions to be envied, are faced with the mystery of one’s own existence, having this question no longer hidden by the daily struggle for sustenance.

It is from the people who suffer this existential dread that the true believers come from, their passionate drive being fueled by a desire to escape facing the question of their own existence by reducing as much dissonance as possible. They do this first by deceiving themselves that they can build a better world, and thus give themselves purpose and an outlet to reduce the

⁷² Schoeck, 263

⁷³ Ibid., 258

⁷⁴ Ibid., 253

⁷⁵ Ibid., 261-262

existential dissonance. But, entertaining such a delusion is difficult by oneself, and thus there is the need for mass proselytizing in order to help create consonance through strength in numbers. This need for consonance through social reinforcement is why rather than leaving the rest of society alone, the true believers insist on collective salvation. They cannot create a new reality by themselves, they must marshal all of humanity in their Gnostic crusade.

In light of this self-deception, it seems clear that Voegelin was incorrect when he declares that the Marxist need to suppress questions was a result of their being intellectual swindlers.⁷⁶ The need to suppress questions stems from the need to reduce cognitive dissonance and if the Marxists and other Gnostics are swindling anyone it is first and foremost themselves with their dissonance reducing self-delusion.

When viewed as a way to reduce the cognitive dissonance brought about by their inability to face the question of their existence, all of the true believers' political activity can be understood as a way of mass proselytizing. And as touched upon above in reference to John Dewey, one of the most important ways to mass proselytize is through the state's compulsory education system.

Ayn Rand discusses the anti-liberal nature of the state education system extensively in her essay *The Comprachicos* where she compares what happens to children's mind in the progressive education process to the physical deformation they were forced to undergo in order to provide entertainment in the 17th century. Rand's main point is that the progressive education system is created in such a way that it is "anti-cognitive and anti-conceptual" and promotes "conformity to the group."⁷⁷ The effect of this "anti-conceptual approach" is that a school child will "conclude that the world is a bewildering chaos, where the fact he grasped today is reversed

⁷⁶ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 262-267

⁷⁷ Rand, 51-53

tomorrow, where the more he sees the more helpless he becomes.”⁷⁸ The end result of this approach is that most schoolchildren are left adrift without the proper cognitive tools to properly discover the nature of reality and operate in it accordingly. Thus, they are left with the choice of “reason vs. people” as a way to ascertain reality.⁷⁹

The indoctrination of children with a mob spirit—under the category of ‘social adjustment’—is conducted openly and explicitly. The supremacy of the pack is drilled, pounded and forced into the student’s minds by every means available to the comprachicos of the classroom, including the contemptible policy of grading the students based on their social adaptability (under various titles). No better method than this type of grading could be devised to turn him into a stale little conformist, to stunt his unformed sense of personal identity and make him blend into an anonymous mob, to penalize the best, the most intelligent and hone’st children in the class, and to reward the worst, the dull, the lethargic, the dishonest.”⁸⁰

Thus the pneumopathological progressive educators are able to not only inculcate the idea that there is no objective reality and therefore that their gnostic vision is in fact a possibility, but they are also able to strengthen the amount of cognitive dissonance created when someone strays from the majority opinion, an opinion they are able to shape through the education system. But they do far more than increase the importance of conformity, they are able to create dissonance about the nature of reality. The pneumopathological true believers are then able to harness this dissonance

⁷⁸ Ibid., 57

⁷⁹ Ibid., 73-74

⁸⁰ Ibid., 70

for their own ends saying that “there is nothing wrong with him [the student experiencing dissonance], he is told, his is the healthy natural state, he is merely unable to function in a ‘System’ that ignores human nature.” It is communicated to him “that all of his troubles—from poor grades to sexual problems to chronic anxiety—are all caused by the *political* system and that the enemy is capitalism.”⁸¹ Thus in the best case the true believers ranks grow, and in the worst case they are able to create more mildly pneumopathological people following the illiberal crowd.

Implications for Liberals

The points made above have serious implications for liberals and the success of strategies they employ to affect social change. There are several important points to be understood, the first of which is the parasitic nature Gnosticism has with the liberal system. As mentioned previously, much of the true believer’s attitude stems from being unable to face their existential reality no longer hidden from them by the constant toil of the struggle for survival and the resulting attempts to reduce the ensuing dissonance. Pre-capitalist times were full of natural selection where only the strong survived, and in order to survive one must comport themselves to some extent to reality. If one did not do so one would not survive. However, with the arrival of the liberal system and the unprecedented prosperity it made possible it was no longer the case that only the strong survived, and furthermore it was no longer the case that one must comport themselves to reality lest they perish. The excess of the capitalist system subsidizes those who do not comport themselves to reality whereas without it the Gnostics would surely perish or comport themselves to reality.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid., 86-87

⁸² The history of the Soviet Union is an example of Gnosticism taken to such an extreme that it surpassed the capitalist subsidy.

It must also be recognized that the existence of envy and cognitive dissonance does not preclude any pro-liberal change from occurring or that attempting to check envy is in and of itself a pneumopathical delusion. On the contrary, rather than creating a second reality, the liberal system strives to comport itself to reality. Historical experience shows that it is possible in various ways to overcome and limit envy to allow for economic flourishing. Indeed Schoeck views the very creation of the capitalist system as being made possible by the overcoming of envy that was a result of the development of the Protestant ethic.⁸³ According to Deirdre McClosky it was a change in society's perception toward the merchant middle class that unleashed the modern world as it is today, saying "it took much, much more than theft or capital accumulation to ignite the Industrial Revolution—it took a big shift in how Westerners thought about commerce and innovation." Rather than being envied or despised, wealth creators began to gain respect and dignity. It is to this new found dignity that McClosky attributes the modern era and the unprecedented contemporary prosperity.⁸⁴

If envy is a facultative characteristic of human nature, as historical experience seems to indicate, then it is not pneumopathological to believe that through the adaptation of societal norms the effects of envy can be greatly reduced.

It is clear liberals now know what their biggest foe is; namely the consonance generated by the positive social reinforcement that comes from the state being the accepted majority opinion among society. Once that status is undermined, the Gnostics will have lost one of the largest benefits they have on their side. The current liberal struggle must in many ways be viewed as a struggle to preserve the gains made by the previous reduction of envy and to further

⁸³ Schoeck, 308.

⁸⁴ McClosky, 27-30 Also see the *The Bourgeoisie Era* Trilogy by Deirdre McClosky for more on the changing societal norms that paved the way for the industrial revolution

diminish and contain the effect of envy. The vast majority of the populace who oppose liberalism simply in order to avoid the dissonance that comes from disagreeing with the majority can just as easily switch their support to liberalism given the right social circumstances.

The majority of social change efforts must therefore be focused on undermining the legitimacy of the state as a majority opinion. If the liberal view of peaceful voluntary exchange being the optimal social system is to come into the majority, then it too shall be able to enjoy the benefits of the added consonance created by positive social reinforcement and not only will pneumopathological tendencies be reduced, but the remaining people who suffer under pneumopathological delusions will themselves be the minority and will suffer additional cognitive dissonance as a result of that position.

It is also clear that the Gnostic's control of the compulsory state education system plays a great part in solidifying their ability to ensure that the legitimacy of the state remains a majority opinion among the general public. If the liberal program is to be successful it is imperative that this system be undermined and overcome.⁸⁵

Conclusion

This paper has explored the concepts of envy and cognitive dissonance and the ways in which they can lead to the development of anti-liberal pneumopathologies. Inequality leads to the creation of dissonance as a result of man's inadequacies in the face of reality. This dissonance manifests itself in the form of envy as an outlet for said dissonance. Envy, and the fear of envy leads to the desire to create an egalitarian utopia where there is no envy and thus the pneumopathology is born.

The anti-liberal pneumopathology is reinforced by the consonance created by the positive

⁸⁵ The pneumopathological nature of the state education system is an area needing much more work and study in the future.

social reinforcement that is a result of aligning one's cognitions with the majority view and by the need to ward off even more dissonance created by the fact that the pneumopathological delusion is not possible.

Only after liberalism has been able to displace the legitimacy of the state as the majority view in a society will the widespread containment of envy among the general populace be possible and as a result reduce the prominence of illiberal pneumopathological delusions among society.

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