

Purity, Hospitality, Monsters, and Mortality



Reflections on Mercy and Sacrifice

Based on the book “Unclean” by Dr. Richard Beck, Chair,
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Introduction

- Psalm 40: 6-7
- Psalm 51: 17-18
- Hosea 6: 6
- Amos 5: 21-22
- Isaiah 1:11-17
- Matthew 12:7
- Matthew 9:13

Intro...

Dixie Cup research...



- Cleanliness rituals?
- Eating?
- Interpersonal contact?
- Church rituals?

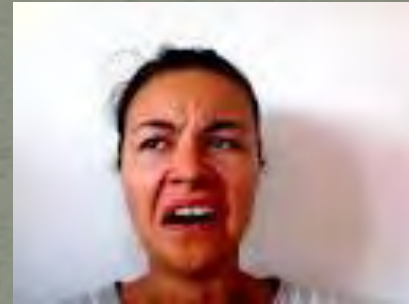
Basic Psychology

- Shared Emotions

- Anger
- Fear
- Affection
- Joy

- Disgust?

- Ekman and Friesen, “Constants Across Cultures”
 - Disgust is Human
 - All Humans Share a distinctive facial expression, linked to an urge to spit, or expel the offending substance (Chapman et al.)



Disgusting!

Disgust

- Not present at birth
- Culture-sensitive
- Latency period
- Similar to language development
- Plastic
 - Unlike other emotions, disgust stimuli can vary.



Disgust

Disgust is a *boundary psychology* – it monitors the boundaries of the body for offensive or toxic substances.

Disgust is also an *expulsive psychology* – it motivates physical and behavioral responses aimed at pushing away, avoiding, or forcefully expelling an offensive object.

Disgust Stimuli in North America

- Food
- Body Products (feces, vomit, urine)
- Animals (insects, rats)
- Sexual Behaviors (incest, bestiality, homosexuality)
- Contact with the dead or corpses
- Violation of the exterior envelope of the body (deformity, gore)
- Poor Hygiene
- Interpersonal contamination (contact with unsavory persons)
- Moral Offenses

Disgust Stimuli

(Rozin, et al.)

- Core Disgust
 - Revulsion centered on eating and oral incorporation: the adaptive core of disgust
- Sociomoral Disgust
 - Revulsion centered on moral and social judgments: the aspect of disgust related to issues of hospitality in Matthew 9.
- Animal-Reminder Disgust
 - Revulsion centered on stimuli that function as death/mortality reminders: the existential aspect of disgust.

Core disgust

Section 2



...disgust is more than simple distaste. Many things taste bad but are not disgusting, like coffee or lemons. ...disgust involves the feeling of *revulsion*, a visceral, almost nauseous, response. And this revulsion is very often triggered by a judgment or appraisal of contamination or pollution.

Unclean, Chapter 2

Contamination and Contagion in Core Disgust



What if the cockroach were removed?

What if the juice were filtered?

What if the juice were filtered, boiled, and filtered again?

WOULD YOU DRINK IT?

Rules governing judgments of contamination

- Similarity
 - If it looks like it, it IS it...
- Contact
 - Once in contact, always in contact
- Dose Insensitivity
 - A little dab'll do ya
- Permanence
 - Once contaminated, always contaminated
- Negativity Dominance
 - The pollutant is always stronger

Sociomoral & Animal Reminder disgust

Section 3



The latency and plasticity of core disgust and the rules governing contamination and expulsion perform an important function that has allowed the human animal to adapt to and thrive in all climates and areas of this globe.

However, again due to the latency and plasticity of core disgust, these reactions often attach themselves to social and moral actions dictated by the society in which we live – often with damaging effects for the follower of Jesus.

The logic of contamination is called “magical” because it makes causal judgments that defy the laws of physics. That isn’t to say that magical thinking has no basis in reality or adaptive value. Generally speaking if a foodstuff makes contact with or is in close physical proximity to a known pollutant we should, from an adaptive stance , be wary about eating the food. Contact is a legitimate heuristic in thinking about contagion and contamination. The problem comes when the logic of “contact” begins to be applied in situations where it shouldn’t apply.

Unclean, Chapter 2, section 3

“Magic” Thinking and sociomoral judgments

- Contact
 - Studies reveal that people tend to think of evil as if it were a virus, a disease, or a contagion. Evil is sticky and contagious, so we stay away. These fears get imported into social or religious conversation and decision making.
- Matthew 9:13

“Magic” Thinking and sociomoral judgments

- Dose Insensitivity
 - The “logic” of dose insensitivity implies that even very small pollutants can have catastrophic effects.
 - Neighborhood outrage when a playground is found to have trace (but harmless) levels of toxins in the soil.
 - The Nazi “Final Solution”
 - Small changes in worship practices?
 - Political “Hot Buttons”?

“Magic” Thinking and sociomoral judgments

- Permanence
 - Once deemed contaminated nothing can be done to rehabilitate or purify the object.

“Magic” Thinking and sociomoral judgments

- Negativity Dominance
 - This criteria has serious implications for a missional church, as illustrated in our key passage from Matthew 9. In the missional moment, when the church makes contact with the world, due to negativity dominance the power sits securely with the world.
 - What is striking about the Gospels is how Jesus reverses the polarity of this belief...Jesus is *Positivity Dominant*.

“Magic” Thinking and sociomoral judgments

- HOWEVER:
 - Religion offers one way to reverse this contamination.
 - Levitical cleanliness codes
 - Ritual Washings
 - Sacrifice
- This leads to a focus on PURITY

Purity

Section 4



Morality and Disgust

- The link between morality and disgust is mediated by metaphor, grounded in concrete experience.
- In scripture, metaphors are used to illustrate the functions of sin and grace.

Metaphor	Sin	Grace/Salvation	Textual Ex.
Purity	Unclean	Pure/Clean	Hebrews 10:22
Relational	Enemy	Friend	James 4:4
Sleep	Sleep	Awake	Mark 13:36
Military	War	Peace	2 Cor. 10:4
Economic	Debt	Payment	Matthew 18:27
Biological	Death	Life	Romans 6:23
National	Alien	Citizen	Ephesians 2:19

Morality and disgust

- The existence of disgust psychology can (and often does) lead to the privileged use of purity metaphors in the church.
 - We (or this place)are washed
 - We (or this place)are clean
 - We (or this place)are pure
- The cleanliness metaphor appeals to us on a sub-rational, emotional level. Unfortunately, this appeal also leads to the attachment of “magical” thinking to those things in our world that violate the cleanliness metaphor.

Morality and disgust

- How deep is the pre-rational, psychological attachment to purity metaphors? Let's see...
- Think of a time in the past when you sinned...
- Got it? OK...now...

Complete the following word:

SO_P

The Macbeth Effect

- Studies done by Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist
Subjects were divided into two groups. One was asked to recall past infractions. Both groups were asked to complete a set of words that had a cleansing and a non-cleansing possibility. The group who had recalled their past sins chose the cleansing term with far greater frequency than the control.
In the second study, the groups were offered a token gift upon completion: a pencil or a sanitary hand cloth. The test group selected the sani-wipe with far greater frequency.
- In short, sin/guilt makes us think about dirt.

The Macbeth Effect

- Studies done by Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist

In the third study, the entire group was asked to recall moral failings. Some were then allowed to use a sani-wipe to clean their hands. Following that, the group was given a survey of emotional state. The participants who had washed their hands reported better emotional states than those who had not used the cloth.

They were then asked to perform an act of charity (helping another graduate student with a study for free). 74% of those who had not cleansed agreed, while only 41% of those who had cleansed agreed.

- Our mind equates physical washing (or ritual) with emotional cleansing, and makes us less likely to engage in altruism. What impact might this have in a church?

Love & Boundaries

Section 5



I desire mercy, and not sacrifice

- The metaphor chosen as central will color reactions to situations. In Matthew 9, the Pharisees are functioning with a purity metaphor, bringing the magical thinking of disgust and the concern for cleanliness into play. Their boundary is clear and the expulsive reaction to contagion is in play.
- However, Jesus urges “KIND-ness”, an expansion of the boundary, an inclusion of the other.

I desire mercy, and not sacrifice

- In Matthew 8, we again see Jesus reverse the psychology of purity in the healing of a leper:
 - “And Jesus stretched out his hand and *touch*ed him, saying ‘I will; be clean’”
- The early church in Acts did not grow explosively until Peter’s vision in Acts 10. The vision of unclean animals (core disgust) led immediately to a meeting with a gentile (sociomoral disgust), which led to the offering of the gospel...

I desire mercy, and not sacrifice

- The world, psychologically speaking, is divided in to Me and Not-Me. Selfhood is, at root, a boundary. We include many things into Me, but the purity metaphor, driven by disgust , will lead to expulsion of that which may contaminate Me. This flies in the face of the Mercy that Jesus (and Hosea) explicitly says is desired by God.
- This can be seen in our language of love: we are “in” love, we become “one flesh”, those we love are “close” to us, when love cools we grow “distant”, we have a “circle of friends”, we want to “pull back” from a relationship. Love is on the *inside* of the symbolic self.
 - Love leads to a suspension of disgust and contamination sensitivity.

I desire mercy, and not sacrifice

- Purity *erects* boundaries between the self and the other.
- Love *dismantles* boundaries between the self and the other.
- It is impossible to exclude and embrace at the same time. Mercy *and* Sacrifice cannot coexist.

Monsters & Scapegoats

Section 6



What is a Scapegoat?

- Sociomoral disgust is often the engine of social scapegoating.
- On a day-to-day basis, few of us struggle with sociomoral disgust. But during times of social stress and crisis, sociomoral disgust can infect a population.
- The mechanism of sociomoral disgust may then be used to identify an outcast person or group to be “sacrificed for the good of the nation/group/institution”.

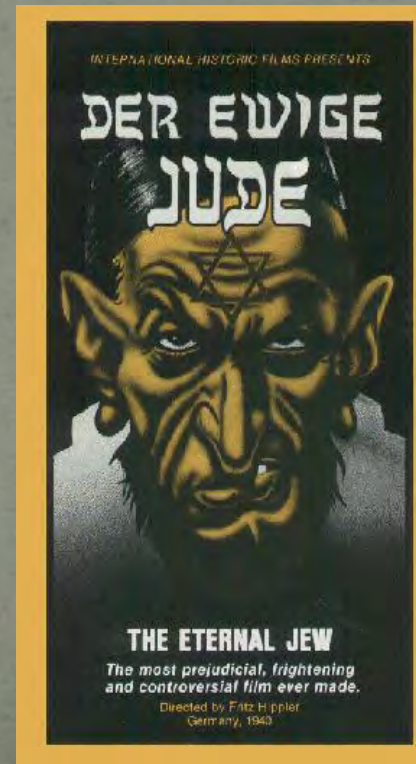
What is a Scapegoat?

- In order for the group to carry through this mechanism (scapegoating) without carrying guilt, it is necessary to somehow designate the victim a “monster”.
- The word “monster” has its origins in the Latin *monstrum* meaning “omen” or “warning”.
- Monsters exist in all cultures, and share characteristics:

Aggressive	Gigantic	Man-Eating
Malevolent	Hybrids	Gruesome
Atavistic	Powerful	Violent

What is a Scapegoat?

Fear dominates this list. Fears of predation. Fears of destruction. But- disgust also is implicated. Monsters, visually and in their behavior, trigger revulsion and disgust.



What is a Scapegoat?



The great moral temptation in scapegoating is that it often feels justified and righteous. The sinful mechanism is often hidden from view. Witch-hunts tend to be fueled by religious and moral fury. In fact, there is a very intimate connection between scapegoating and the experience of the sacred. And, due to this close association, religion is often at the forefront of social scapegoating.

Unclean Ch 6, part 3.

Unless sociomoral disgust is addressed in the heart, efforts toward justice, hospitality, or charity will be, in the end, ineffective and distancing. The “will to embrace” must proceed any judgments of the other. Embrace must be *deep* and should not be reduced to social or political rearrangements and accommodations.

Now for the GOOD news!

In the Gospel story of Christ's crucifixion, we see Jesus marked as "Unclean" and expelled from society, but we as the reader are aware of his innocence...the scapegoat mechanism is laid bare, uncovered for what it is. And, in the resurrection, we see Jesus' refusal to claim the revenge that human society would say is rightly his. His refusal to continue the cycle of violence frees us to follow his lead: the mechanism is exposed, the voice of the victim is heard!