Three fantasies

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Fantasy serves purposes beyond pleasure and wish fulfillment. In particular, it helps with deciding how to respond to situations outside the normal boundaries of a person’s experience, especially when they involve substantial uncertainty and danger. This essay will consider three such fantasies, the purposes they can serve, and the consequences that accompany their use: the ‘what would Jesus do’ fantasy, along with those of the soldier and the spy.

Each fantasy helps to address the universal human unknown of death — both how to confront it and (potentially) when and how to inflict it on others. All three fantasies evoke figures that are powerful in different ways and capable of defeating opponents that are in many senses stronger.

**1 Jesus**

The idea of a Jesus fantasy is arguably paradoxical, since the primary meaning of the Christ story is self- sacrifice for the benefit of others. As a result, the fantasy either fails to be self-serving or can only be self-serving at a higher level of analysis: for instance, on the basis that nobility is its own reward, even when it involves great pain. Christ’s sacrifice is the basis for the reverence directed at him. It is also the reason why his example is impossible to emulate in practice (people die for their fellows with fair frequency, but such sacrifices are not taken to have the same significance as Christ’s). At the same time, while Christ’s mortality is overlaid upon ultimate invulnerability, those who choose to emulate him may suffer an even harsher punishment for their determination: sacrifice without glory and immortality to follow.1

As ‘the man with nothing to gain’, Christ can also help us access the inherent goodness that is possible in

a choice, which exists aside from its social significance. The Christ fantasy can be a way to counterbalance the tendency to be self-serving, but it can also be messianic delusion. Those who emulate Jesus can gain influence over others because we find those who are committed to a cause to be impressive and worthy of admiration.

Jesus has the worst possible operational security — knowingly permitting a lethal betrayal.

1 For instance, the sacrifice offered by Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* arguably exceeds that of Christ himself. Christ is guaranteed glory and eternal life after his crucifixion (“on me let Death wreck all his rage; / Under his gloomy power I shall not long / Lie vanquished ... Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave” (Book III, 241-3, 247)). Eve has no such guarantee when she offers herself as penance for the wrongdoing of herself and Adam (“There with my cries importune heaven, that all

/ The sentence from thy head removed may light / On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe, / Me me only just object of his ire.” (Book X, 934-6)). At the utmost, mortals who choose to emulate Christ subject themselves to Christ’s suffering without his resurrection.

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**2 Soldier**

Soldiers operate under rules of conduct that differ substantially from those of everyday life. Civilians make their own choices, rarely knowingly confront death, and are never called upon to kill. The life of a soldier is dangerous and defined by duty and camaraderie. In situations where an individual needs to deal with the acute possibility of death, the soldier fantasy can provide a useful template for acceptable (and perhaps even laudable) behaviour.

Soldiers also have an awkward relationship with their enemies, who they cannot help but see as occupying positions that are parallel to their own. At least when he subscribes to your basic philosophy of warfare, your enemy is your comrade who you have to kill. Soldier fantasies can provide an escape from responsibility, both because the concept of duty can supersede individual responsibility and because war frequently involves choosing between undesirable outcomes. Unlike the spy, the soldier values valour above success. There is greater honour to be had in just conduct than in achieving victory at any cost.

Good military officers are self-sacrificing and willing to lead from the front. At the same time, they must be prudent in the use of men and willing to trade off the lives of some for the lives of others. Life sometimes requires us to play the odds with the highest possible stakes, and the soldier fantasy provides cognitive models to help. Similarly, soldiers must be prepared to use violence in some circumstances and — by imagining themselves in such a role — non-soldiers can reconcile themselves to doing so as well. Soldiers also know when to retreat and when to surrender, and have means of coping in the midst of severe disorder.

**3 Spy**

The spy is distinguished by superior theory of mind: awareness of the internal complexity in the minds of others, and the possibilities of deceit that accompany that. The key characteristic of a spy is savviness: realizing that there may be plots unfolding, and having some ability to anticipate them. In a social world where others will try to mislead us, the spy’s counterintelligence capabilities have defensive value. At the same time, the spy is always in danger of getting trapped in irresolvable uncertainty and paranoia; every feint can contain another feint within it, and it is impossible to know for sure that you have identified the lowest level of a plot. Spies spend their lives looking for the weaknesses in one another’s systems.

The spy’s abilities also create opportunities for manipulation. Spies are romantic, powerful, and exciting. Partly, this is because they have privileged access to secret information that has social value. The spy can haggle and seduce, as well as employ disguise and misdirection. It is often possible to deceive others, and

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can be seriously advantageous to do so.

The spy must fend for himself - he cannot count on support from his allies or mercy from his enemies. He must be able to operate autonomously and accept the possibility of capture, torture, and death. Spies can make use of multiple strategies at the same time, making use of multiple individuals who don’t know about one another’s roles, and cultivating redundancy in plans to deal with the unexpected.

**4 Conclusions**

You can live in your fantasies, because the mind is its own place and as open to exploration as the physical world. More usefully, fantasies can mediate between the demands made by the external world and a person’s own thinking. Fantasies can serve as a cover and justification for self-destructive behaviour, or serve as a template for rising above human limitation.

Your writing style is grammatically correct and easy to understand at the sentence level. You are presenting a unique perspective here, but I do not see a clear connection to the topic of self-deception. If there is one, you should specifically make the case for it. I had trouble with some of your “A therefore B” logic. You have no references…is the reader to assume that everything you say is purely your own conjecture and there are no statements of fact? To move ahead, I suggest that your writing be somewhat less “grandiose” and be more precise in describing the logical connections supporting your thesis (which should relate to self-deception). If you intend something to be taken as a statement of fact, then you should be sure of what you say and cite your support……..65