



**SPIRALING
MADNESS**

Sebastian de Assis

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Blooming World Books

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In order to avoid the cumbersome dual gender use of the singular third person pronouns, I have opted to refer to all third person instances using the masculine pronouns he/his/him. In my previous efforts to remain gender unbiased in my writings, I have struggled with the burdensome approach of alternating between he and she throughout the text. Determined to stay true to my steadfast commitment to gender equality, as well as my respect and esteem for my fellow female human beings, I insisted on the awkward alternation between he/she and him/her, which has proven to be encumbering to my writing process. Hence, I decided to simplify it with the self-assurance that my values and appreciation for the opposite sex remain unblemished.

As I surmise that many writers feel the same way about the usage of gender pronouns, I suggest that all male writers make use of the masculine pronouns, and all female counterparts employ the feminine pronouns. This would eliminate once and for all the uncomfortable indecision in the face of linguistic political correctness protocol.

Until grammarians institute gender-neutral pronouns, my suggestion above envisions to eliminate the clumsy transitions between pronouns based on gender. In the end, it is our common humanity that unifies us all, regardless of how it shows on the pages.



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*“Too much sanity may be madness—and maddest of all: to see
life as it is and not as it should be”*

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616)



The Madness of History



The madness of history can be best characterized by a concept developed by the genius of a madman, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose idea of Eternal Recurrence was first introduced in his book, *Gay Science*. He tells the story of a demon that sneaks into the “loneliness loneliness” of one’s mind to proclaim that life will repeat itself in an endless tedious process:

“This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live it once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it; but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you—and in the same succession and sequence...Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?”¹

The above quote summarizes the madness of history: a repetitive pattern in which the *Homo dementis* (the internal madman) comes out to manifest itself through exploitation, oppression, morbid selfishness, violence, and all the other ignoble characteristics of this perennial stagnant stage of human underdevelopment. No matter how far back you look in the history of humanity’s evolution—and I would argue that there is an element of devolution in the coming of age of the species—there is a vile thread of continuity of inherent animalistic madness. Perhaps, Nietzsche’s countryman and fellow distinguished philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), was correct when he uttered his now famous axiom: “The greatest lesson of history is that humankind never learns the lessons of history.”

And so the madness has been repeating itself throughout the course of history. Like the Buddhist concept of *Samsara*, the term used to describe the ordinary world dominated by the endless cycle of birth and death (reincarnation), the madness in the world keeps recurring in a vicious cycle of self-destruction that is about to reach its zenith. Barbarian wars, senseless acts of terrorism, horrific crimes against humanity, subjugation of peoples, exploitation and slavery of vulnerable populations, among many other atrocities, have been recorded in the annals of history in accordance with Nietzsche's concept of Eternal Recurrence. The greatest danger, however, is the possibility of things getting worse with the passing of time. As historical philosopher Ronald Wright (1948–) pointed out, "Each time history repeats itself, the cost goes up."²

Although some historians tend to focus on the study of history based on important sociopolitical events such as wars and revolutions, most tend to define history as the story of people and the study of our past in the broadest sense. The truth is that our lives today are shaped by decisions and actions made decades, centuries, or even thousands of years ago—and what will happen in the future hinges on decisions and actions being carried out today. Thus, by understanding the past, we may be able to gain a more balanced view of the present,³ as well as to project the consequences of our current actions into the future.

But as far as the madness of history is concerned, it is not necessary to examine the details of historical events that took place centuries or even thousands of years ago to grasp the cruel cycle of collective self-inflicted pain and suffering. All that is needed is to pick out a few historical patterns and occurrences in order to make sense of the madness we experience today. And among the numerous examples to choose from, perhaps none illustrates the case more emphatically than chattel slavery; the once legal and morally accepted ownership of human beings. Even though the institution of slavery has been abolished in most countries, it has mutated into different guises of socially condoned practices in the post-Industrial Revolution era. "This is a preposterous argument!" I've heard many pundits and academics object whenever I referred to human labor exploitation for profit as a transmuted form of slavery that has the blessings of society. My rebuke has been based on a

simple question: How do you think the terms “financial freedom” and “slave wage” came about?



Arguably the most influential philosopher of the Enlightenment Movement of the 18th century, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) begins his *Social Contract* with a statement that is as meaningful as it is undeniable: “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”⁴ The reasoning supporting Rousseau’s controversial tenet is the idea that man is inherently good in his natural state (“the noble savage”), but it is society and progress that corrupt man’s natural good. For Rousseau, society is the original sin; but for me, slavery is the original crime in the madness of history—and the aim of world history ought to be human freedom.

Throughout the course of history, slavery has been the predominant factor in the economic lives and development of most civilizations. From the ancient world of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and all the way to modern day states, slavery has been the main propelling force that catapulted the economic prosperity of many nations and few individuals. Validated by religious and philosophical misconceptions ranging from the Bible to the writings of renowned Greek philosophers (namely, the Aristotelian concept that some men were born to be masters while others were destined for subjection)⁵, the endorsement of human ownership has been widely accepted as a normal and ethical practice. In fact, in chapter 3 verse 16 of the book of Genesis, the allusion to the natural right to slavery seems evident with statements such as “...he shall be your master;” and the book of Exodus, chapter 21, verses 4-6, strongly reiterates the pro-slavery claim: “...and the man shall be his slave for life.”⁶ Similar references to the right of slavery abound in the Islamic holy book, the Koran, as verse 16:73 corroborates: “God makes this comparison. On the one hand there is a helpless slave, the property of his master. On the other, a man whom We have bestowed Our bounty, so that he gives of it both in private and in public. Are the two alike? God forbid!”⁷

With the madness of ownership of human beings validated by both religious and philosophical principles, the “discovery” of the New World opened the flood gates for massive import of subjugated Africans who endured terribly inhumane conditions. They were to become the rightful property of landowners of a stolen new world conquered by domi-

nance and chicanery. The native inhabitants of the pristine lands (the noble savages that Rousseau alluded to) were summarily eliminated with the remaining numbers confined to “reservations;” a euphemism to concentration camps.

Of course, if human bondage is accepted and perceived as an inalienable right, the right to private property of parcels of the Earth is an indisputable entitlement of the fittest, even if possessed by sheer force. To the Native Americans, however, the concept of owning the land was so farfetched that they could not comprehend the madness of owning that which owns us. This common stance is reflected in the words of Chief Seattle’s (c. 1786–1866) reply to a government offer to purchase the remaining Salish lands: “The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth.”⁸

As the winds of madness swept across the west of the newly conquered continent, the religious and philosophical self-validations to take over native people’s land strengthened the pseudo-rationale while assuaging the guilt. Manifest Destiny became a God-given right “to possess the whole of the continent that Providence has given us,” wrote journalist John Louis O’Sullivan (1813–1895) in 1845 about the westward expansion of the United States, which leaped from his article into the public imagination. “It is a right such as that of a tree to the space of air and earth suitable for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth.”⁹ Although they were able to manifest the destiny of taking over the natives’ land, they were incapable of enslaving the noble savages.

After numerous wars, some of which engaged the use of biological weapons (distributing smallpox-infested blankets to natives), the peoples of the three Americas succumbed to the manifest destiny of the foreign invaders. Deprived of their land, culture, and dignity, they were either whisked to reservations in a sort of ad hoc imprisonment or wiped out altogether. It is the unacknowledged holocaust committed on the west shores of the Atlantic Ocean; a crime that the people with God-given rights refuse to admit. After all, Providence has always been on their side of history.

In the meantime, millions of African slaves toiled in the fields to enrich their wicked masters. It was the norm of an insane—and hypocritical—way of being. Ironically, some of the same men who drafted an

eloquent document proclaiming that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” deprived their human private properties of an entitlement that the Creator supposedly bestowed upon all of us. In spite of the hypocrisy underlining this issue, it established the political, social, and economic conditions of the so-called New World. Even today, from the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro to the projects in the inner-cities of the United States, the legacy of this madness endures.

But then came the liberator; the abolitionary; the savior; the Industrial Revolution. In a new system of mass production, the constant need for consumers made chattel slavery obsolete, for slaves did not earn income, therefore could not purchase anything. Thus, as industrial development expanded throughout the northern regions of the United States, the advocacy for abolition of slavery grew concomitantly. In timely convenient fashion, all of a sudden the sentiment of slavery as an immoral practice spread throughout the north. However, since the southern states’ economies depended on slave labor for their continuous prosperity, the American Civil War (1861–1865) became inevitable, as it did the transmutation of slavery into a morally acceptable form of economic oppression. Now, the new impersonal master carrying a whip in his invisible hand became able to enslave everyone.

In the approximately 100-year period between the American Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the madness of history did not subside, but merely changed the circumstances in which it played itself out. The reintegration of the traditional African slaves into “the open free society” proved to be a sham, as they still undergo a significant degree of cultural prejudice and social disadvantage. After enduring decades of oppression and discrimination, they must find solace in the fact that at least now the new slave master has leveled the playing field. It is no longer an issue of race, but of economic status that determines the rules of the game for everyone, regardless of the ethnic background. Black, red, yellow, or white; it doesn’t matter what the color of the skin is. Economic status is the new letter of abolition from slavery. It is all about financial manumission.



The madness of history is the madness of human exploitation. We are the only animals that are both the predators and preys to the members of our own species—and this nefarious approach has only become more complex with the development of exploitation stratagems. The *Homo dementis*, whose malignant DNA is embedded in our historical psyche, never pauses to rest. He's always devising new ways of improving his craft. And the more he engineers new means of manipulation of people, nature, and technology, the closer to the edge of the abyss he moves. And since 1945 with the introduction to the destructive power of atomic energy, we have sped up the pace toward the rim of the precipice to the point we can now look down and see the bottom with great anxiety and fear. At this juncture, considering the situation of the world and the disarray of the human species, if it is true that “each time history repeats itself, the cost goes up,” we might be heading to a final payment of our dues.

In an overly populated world in which individuals and nations engage in fierce competition with one another; where increasing hatred and mistrust abound amidst the awareness of Earth's dwindling resources, the collective despair is evident in the day-to-day living. In the news, at work, on the streets; every day we see signs that the madness of history is still unfolding at a terrifying rate.

Perhaps, if we could understand the psychological makeup of the *Homo dementis*, we might be able to take a peek through the chinks of the ethereal skull that hides the essence of the human collective madness.

NOTES

¹ Shelley O'Hara, *Nietzsche within your grasp* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2004), 19.

² Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 107.

³ “Henry Ford, the American car manufacturer, once said ‘History is bunk, but most people would disagree. Our lives today are shaped by decisions and actions made decades, centuries, or even thousands of years ago. By understanding the past, we may be able to gain a more balanced view of the pre-

sent.”” Anita Ganeri et al., *Encyclopedia of World History* (United Kingdom: Paragon Books, Ltd., 2009), 8.

⁴ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Washington Square Press Publications, 1967), 7.

⁵ Aristotle discusses this issue in his books *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle, *On Man In The Universe* (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1943).

⁶ Roger Sawyer, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Inc., 1986), 235.

⁷ Dawood, N.J., comp. and ed., *The Koran* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 192.

⁸ For the complete speech of Chief Seattle, refer to the text of Native American Chiefs compiled and edited by Kent Nerburn, *The Wisdom of the Native Americans* (New York: MJF Books, 1999), 193-199.

⁹ Editors of Time-Life Books, *The Wild West* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1993), 28.