

Noor El-Gazairly

Dr. Gingrich

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Validity of Emergence of Talent in the Face of Adversity

Adversity can be found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary with the apt definition of “a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune”. Adversity can be experienced through multiple means or facets. For example, while one might consider their poor financial state an oppressive obstacle that hinders them in a certain way, another person in a financial position that they don’t feel is the causation of difficulty might experience adversity based on any other number of factors such as gender, skin color, religion, or being differently-abled. Roman poet Horace argued that adversity is a direct cause to the emergence and development of certain talents in humans that would’ve otherwise not existed. While this might be a factor in the development of talents, I believe that adversity is only a small part of what contributes to our individual human natures for the reason that Horace’s arguments assumes the total malleability of human character. While it is perfectly sound and proven to say that a diamond is solely the product of pressure in their environment, it is not accurate to equate the same logic to the development of human character. The development of diamonds can be proven and recreated over and over in a controlled scientific setting, but humans on the other hand are less predictable or creatable. For that to be able to happen, we would need to be able to scientifically define or find what makes human personality and soul—a feat which is yet to be done. Instead of the assumption that humans are perfectly and completely susceptible to external obstacles that are

adverse, I believe that humans are innately borne with certain talents or able to complete certain feats regardless of the presence or lack of an adverse environment. In fact, even though adversity might influence the curation of talents and human nature, adverse circumstances can be detrimental to the culmination of the very talents Horace attributes to them.

In observed circumstances, adverse circumstances have often led to the death of people—and therefore eliminates character rather than developing them. In the novel *the Crucible*, written by Arthur Miller, adversity is placed on characters in the form of persecution based on accusations of witchcraft. After multiple trials and allegations by a group of girls, a large portion of townspeople found themselves not only socially persecuted, but physically oppressed in jail. Socially, people who became persecuted in the town of Salem for the accusation of witchcraft were placed in a position of social adversity because the society of Salem was exclusively Puritan, and to be accused by the church was to be spiritually and socially alienated from community, and therefore faced with a ginormous obstacle. One character who was targeted by the trials was Giles Corey, and in his position of questioning in the town of Salem and rather than his talents flourishing in the face of the adversity that was experienced by being persecuted by the authority in Salem, he was crushed to death in questioning by having “great stones...lay upon his chest until he plead aye or nay.” (Miller, 100). Corey was only placed in a fatal position because of the onslaught of misfortune that the Witch Trials brought about. He was being tortured by Parris for a confession of collusion with the Devil, for which he was accused and persecuted, and because of this multi-faceted misfortune (social, physical, etc.), Corey was killed in torture, which is just one instance of adversity leading to death. Faced with yet more adversity than most of the accused during the trials, Goody Osborne was in a place of misfortune prior to being accused of witchcraft. She “sleep [sic] in ditches, and (was) so very old and poor” (Miller,

57). Being somewhat of a social pariah and being an outcast in the Salem community, Osborne had already faced adversity in her life in the form of financial hardship, being forced to beg for food and sleep in ditches. Due to this prior life of constant hardship, she was an easy target to name during the trials which eventually claimed her life and is another example of adversity leading to death.

In addition, even if solely adversity could breed talent, more often than not that same adversity becomes the very inhibitor to the use of talents. For example, in *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander depicts the race-based caste system that incarceration systems have placed in to American society and how it creates an extreme hindrance to opportunity and power in minority communities—namely African American and Latinx ones. Communities that are negatively impacted by crime rates, drug rates, and poverty rates are also the ones faced with the social and physical adverse plight of police brutality and incarceration. While the stripping of constitutional rights based on adverse circumstances is illegal, “today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal” (Alexander). This shows many of the different ways that talents—perhaps culminated during the adverse time of incarceration—would be very difficult to be utilized after overcoming said adversity due to systematic and constitutionally upheld (13th amendment) retraction of rights granted to U.S. citizens. How exactly would one who is particularly apt for a specific job due to talents that they established due to the very adverse environment of prison and oppression, be able to use talents

that incline them to that occupation, when employment discrimination towards ex-convicts is not only rampant, but socially upheld (according to the National Employment Law project, 3 out of 4 people remain unemployed a year after being released from prison)? And continuing the trend of exponential hardship following conviction, unemployment disparities are not made up for by government welfare systems. Even when ex-convicts are not afforded a job, and therefore cannot financially provide for necessities, they can still be denied "...food stamps and other public benefits" (Alexander). Unfortunately, adversity in minority communities can be observed even before periods of incarceration. This adverse oppression can even be observed "under the terms of our country's founding document, (in which) slaves were defined as three fifths of a man, not a real, whole human being" (Alexander). This shows the oppression that African Americans in the United States have suffered since the emergence of our most current regime of government. This adversity of being has been reflected in the way that they have been treated in the U.S., and this adversity can be reflected in their population within the prison system. The rate at which African Americans and Hispanic peoples are entered into the U.S. prison system is completely disproportionate, them making up 32% of American population, yet representing around 56% of prison demographics. Systemic racism and lack of education can prove themselves to be oppressive obstacles, but even if those obstacles do breed certain talents in those that are living under those adverse conditions, it is reasonable to assume that the imposition of a racially-biased incarceration system serves to inhibit the use of those talents, because of a physically imposed imposition of an inhibitor, otherwise known as the prison in which these people are incarcerated.

Horace's observation that adversity "eliciting talents in which prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant" is simply unable to be upheld. Not only is adversity multi-faceted, but one of those facets can serve to further oppress humans despite newly emerged talents, and even

lead to their deaths. Furthermore, the diction of Horace's commentary on the positive effects of adversity is somewhat contradictory. He states that in "prosperous circumstances", talents would not be able to be culminated, however the very definition of prosperous is "auspicious" or "enjoying vigorous and healthy growth" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). How then, would a state of healthy growth be unideal for the development of talents and human character? I personally have discovered many of my own talents through my upbringing, such as an inclination for literature and arts, but I can safely say that this was facilitated directly by my remarkably fortunate circumstances of life. A prosperous setting is not only compatible for the eliciting of talents, but in some respects, favorable. However so, regardless of adverse or prosperous circumstance, I believe that talents that are developed by humans are due to inherent condition that cannot be externally controlled or scientifically measured. In addition, circumstances don't explicitly elicit human talent, but can be the factor that determines the ability to use those talents. Of those circumstances that determine the wielding of talents, adverse conditions often lead to the inability to use or culminate those inherent talents, which disproves Horace's commentary.

Bibliography

Alexander, Michelle. *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New Press, 2016.