

The Camus Distribution

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Summary—This essay compares Bad Behaviourism to Existentialism Now—and, in a parallel and related line of reasoning, compares the normal distribution to the Cauchy distribution—which combine to form The Camus Distribution.

Quotation—Dostoevsky and Nietzsche cherished the deviation from the normal as a stimulate, ordained by fate to strengthen the will to resist, to live more exaltedly, and to probe more deeply into the mysteries of existence. —*William Hubben*

I began my existential journey when I was twenty by reading *The Outsider* by Albert Camus (1913-1960)—and I was hooked. I proceeded to read much of Camus, some smaller books by other existentialists, along with dozens of books about existentialism. Before considering existentialism, the reader might like to reflect on its evolutionary predecessor and the currently deployed philosophical, psychological, and psychiatric model in Canadian society: behaviourism.

Behaviourism is a movement in psychology, psychiatry, and philosophy that emphasizes the outward behavioral aspects of thought and dismisses the inward experiential, and sometimes even the inner procedural, aspects as well. The movement harkens back to the methodological proposals of John Watson (1878-1958), who coined the phrase. BF Skinner (1904-90) followed Watson as a leading American psychologist and proponent of behaviourism in which learning is seen as a process of conditioning contained within environments of stimulus, reward, and punishment. Skinner was the most influential psychologist of the twentieth

century. According to Wikipedia: "Beyond Freedom and Dignity is a 1971 book by American psychologist BF Skinner. Skinner argues that entrenched belief in free will and the moral autonomy of the individual (which Skinner referred to as "dignity") hinders the prospect of using scientific methods to modify behavior for the purpose of building a happier and better-organized society." Behaviourism is the psychological discipline that supports experimental procedures to study observable behavior. Behaviourism dominated psychology for the 20th century and is still in play today—and must be surpassed.

Existentialism. According to Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia "Existentialism is the philosophical movement emphasizing individual existence, freedom and choice that has influenced many diverse writers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, the term is believed to be impossible to define precisely. Certain themes common to virtually all existentialist writers can however be identified. The term itself suggests one major theme—The stress on concrete individual existence and consequently on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice." Webster's Dictionary defines "Existentialism as a 19th and 20th centuries philosophy that is centered on the analysis of existence as not exhaustively describable or understandable in scientific terms. It stresses the freedom and responsibility of the individual, the irreducible uniqueness of an ethical or religious situation." According to Robert Olson: "Existentialism is the most exciting movement in contemporary philosophy. At one time or another almost everyone has reflected upon such existential themes as the source of despair and suffering, the triumph over

adversary, the nature and limits of despair and reason, the encounter of the individual with other human beings, and with society, authenticity, death, and freedom. And whether we can agree or disagree with the existential conclusions, their thinking on these perennial issues is so bold and challenging that it cannot fail to arouse our interests." Existentialism essentially trumps behaviourism.

Inner Thoughts. The question that psychology asks is whether inner thought processes (ie. consciousness and self-awareness) exist or not? Self-awareness is consciousness becoming aware of itself. An absence of self-awareness means that the mind forgets watching itself. A mind that does not watch itself requires society to watch it for them—as in the honourables, doctors, police, and bankers. Watson did not deny the existence of these inner thought processes but insisted they could not be studied because they are not observable. Skinner in turn took Behaviourism to its illogical conclusion by arguing that these thought processes do not exist at all. He made the following argument: "Consciousness. Can you see it? Measure it? Pass it around? Then how is it different than something that does not exist at all?" Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist, had this to say: "There can be no other truth to take off from this—I think therefore I exist—ie. the Cartesian cogito. There we have the absolute truth of consciousness becoming aware of itself. Every theory which takes man out of the moment in which he becomes aware of himself is, at its very beginning, a theory which confounds the truth, for outside the Cartesian cogito, all views are only probable, and a doctrine of probability which is not bound to a truth dissolves into thin air."

The Myth of Sisyphus is a 1942 existential essay by Albert Camus that was influenced by philosophers including Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. In the essay, Camus introduces his philosophy of the absurd, which falls in between the fundamental human need to attribute meaning to life and the unreasonable silence of the universe in response. Camus argues that realizing the absurd does not validate suicide, but rather requires us to revolt. He compares the absurdity of man's life with that of Sisyphus, a Greek mythological figure who was condemned by the gods, for cheating death, to repeat the same task, for all eternity, of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down over and over. Camus concludes the essay by arguing that the struggle is enough to fill a man's heart and therefore imagines Sisyphus happy.

The Question of Suicide. The Myth of Sisyphus asks the only true philosophical question: that of suicide—whether life is worth living. While Camus claims to have answered the question, I contend that it is worth asking over and over throughout life—for one always wants to die well. Consider, for example, an older gentleman who followed through on the Buddha's advice and worked out his salvation with diligence—and is ready to die. Maybe he finds himself in a pickle of his own making as a result of having deviated from the normal and told the truth his entire life. As Plato said: "They hate him the most who tells them the truth." Maybe along the way he took it upon himself to heed Camus' advice and said: I rebel therefore I exist. Maybe he heeded Joaquin Miller's advice and chose to seek immortality as a way of being. Maybe, he did the work necessary to turn himself into the smartest

person who ever lived. And maybe he found Mother Nature's G-spot as the one necessary and sufficient action that will deliver the planet into salvation—by moving from Bad Behaviourism to Existentialism Now. And what if that older gentleman, who has accomplished so much, is me? Have I not earned the right to determine my own destiny?

The Normal Distribution or Gaussian distribution or bell curve is a statistical term frequently used in psychology and other social sciences to describe how traits are distributed through a population. Many phenomena in nature have been found to follow the normal distribution. Some human attributes such as height, weight, intelligence, and even social skills can be said to be normally distributed. The tails of a normal distribution just sort of end at three standard deviations. The central limit theorem is the most common theoretical justification for the argument that phenomena tend to be normally distributed. Because of the importance of the normal distribution, considerable attention has been paid to its historical development. The earliest published derivation of it is from de Moivre dated 12 November 1733.

The Cauchy Distribution or the Lorentzian distribution is used in mechanical and electrical theory, physical anthropology and measurement and calibration problems. In physics it is the distribution of the energy of an unstable state in quantum theory. The Cauchy is also the distribution of the ratio of two independent normally distributed random variables with mean zero. Owing to its extremely long tails, it is a pathological distribution in that it has undefined moments. The longer tails present a vast existential opportunity to deviate from the normal. The Cauchy density function, as defined by curves

proportional to $1 / (x^2 + a^2)$, has been studied for over three centuries.

The Camus Distribution. Modern portfolio theory uses the mean to represent reward and the standard deviation to represent risk—thus laying the groundwork for risk-reward efficiency analysis. The method of moments builds on mean and variance (variance equals standard deviation squared) by adding skewness and kurtosis to represent the first four statistical moments. The normal and Cauchy distributions are continuous probability distributions, symmetric about the mean. The Cauchy distribution has undefined moments, but the first four may be calculated by truncating the tails. The Camus distribution is a four-moment, closed-form distribution that I built by blending the normal with the Cauchy using simulation-based optimization. The Camus Distribution is the crown jewel of The Bernoulli Model—my own postmodern realization of modern portfolio theory.

Freedom and Responsibility are mutually inseparable; we can ensure the benefit of one only by exercising the other. Freedom for all depends on responsibility by each. Therefore, to assure and cultivate our liberties, we must accept responsibility as individuals in a free society. The existential mantra is: "Total freedom and total responsibility." The behavioural mantra is: "Know your role! Know your role!" A metamorphosis is underway from Bad Behaviourism to Existentialism Now, just as one is underway from the normal distribution to the truncated Cauchy distribution. The Camus Distribution blends the normal (behaviourism) with the Cauchy (existentialism)—and is paramount. As Stanislav Grof said: "We are approaching the time of a major paradigm shift."