'Unseen Enemy': Coronavirus as an Archetype of Perception.

by **Ludovic Noble**, *OffGuardian*
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Women hanged for witchcraft in Newcastle, original illustration from Ralph Gardiner's 'England's grievance discovered, in relation to the coal-trade' (1655).

My conjecture is that 'perception of an enemy' could be a Jungian archetype or a category of perception that represents a certain dynamic between groups of humans in societies or between humans and aspects of the world.

Humans are on one level tribal and it could be that tribal creatures have benefitted from being able to unify against a collective perception of an enemy, whether that be a pack of lions, another tribe or an individual within the tribe that must be exterminated or resolved at all costs for the tribe's survival.

It could be argued that this archetype, if it has some physical expression, underwent a process of natural selection, where prehistoric human societies in which it was activated could be provoked into a destructive frenzy that would ensure their survival, in the face of an enemy.

Jordan Peterson explains how swearing uses the same neural system as alarm cries in apes. If this is true, there are neural systems that are representational. The 'enemy' archetype could feasibly be said to be a biological neural system in the brain that has evolved in humans and other social species.

To push this idea further, I hypothesise that there could be a subtype of this 'enemy' archetype, where the enemy is 'unseen.'

History is full of examples of societies that have behaved in a way that suggests that they had collectively activated some primal archetype that fills them with fear and disgust of an 'unseen enemy'. Crucial to the concept, is that the enemy can be (or be in) any member of the group at any one time, making any member of the group potentially a suspect.

An evolutionary argument as to why this archetype might exist could be as follows:

> *a tribe that decided that there was an 'unseen enemy' in their midsts might kill a minority group within the tribe for some arbitrary reason. Whether or not the minority group is guilty, the remaining members tribe would then have a greater share of the resources than they did previously. The*

archetype, then, would have served an evolutionarily advantageous cause.

The devil, evil in general, witches, radical muslim terrorists, Jews, communists and coronavirus are all examples of phenomenon that have become, in some groups of peoples' eyes, in some time in history, an unseen enemy.

Cases in point:

- Witches: The Salem witch trials where any person could be a witch
  and therefore everyone had to be alert to the 'unseen enemy.'
- The devil: In literature regarding the medieval ages (The Name of the Rose and the Devils) the devil is a purgeable demon that could exist in anyone. "He's always the one you least suspect."
- Radical Muslim terrorists: Employed during the War on Terror against anyone carrying a bag on public transport. "If you see anything suspicious please contact a member of staff.
- The persecution of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, who were thought to be secretly plotting to undermine the Reich.
- The House Un-American Activities Committee who sought to root out covert communists from American society in the 1950s.
- All diseases and viruses are unseen and the media and corporations refer to the "fight against coronavirus."

I should say at this point, it is beside the point whether the unseen enemy exists or not. Ultimately this archetype reduces to Descartes' evil demon hypothesis: the idea that there may at any moment be an evil demon manipulating your reality and perceptions.

Deception is an aspect of reality that is employed in daily

life by spiders, lovers, conspirators and criminals. Deception and perception manipulation are facets of human experience, as are theft, parties and commerce.

The power of the 'unseen enemy' archetype is that it doesn't depend on the actual existence of the perceived threat in order to be active. It is possible that:

1. there may be an evil demon and
2. one may perceive there to be an evil demon where there isn't any.

This makes the 'unseen enemy' archetype tremendously powerful and I conjecture that propagandists and governments are well aware of its potential as a tool for directing human behaviour.

When the 'unseen enemy' is defined it usually becomes illegal or taboo to be a member or in any way a part of it. In the case of modern society, one of the manifestations of the 'unseen enemy' archetype at work is the outlawing of Neo-Nazis, 'the far right', racism and 'hate'. Hate speech laws in Europe and a zero tolerance approach to 'hate' in certain institutions in the USA have made it either illegal or extremely taboo to be 'racist.'

Thus the usual open signals of being racist are replaced by alleged covert signs of being racist, and the 'unseen enemy' can now be any member of the society.

This is reflected in popular culture ("just because you have an friend, it doesn't mean you're not racist") and in political language (she / he was accused of 'harbouring hate' in their thoughts or hearts, i.e. it is hidden due to being taboo and so potentially omnipresent).

When something unprovable (in this case, being secretly racist and, in the Middle Ages, being 'inspired by the devil') becomes illegal or

extremely taboo, denial is no longer a defence because it is meaningless. A denial is 'exactly what the unseen enemy [a racist or the devil] would do', both because being one of the unseen enemy is taboo and because by its nature the enemy tries to remain undetected.

Paradoxically, then, **denial becomes proof of guilt or at least not nearly enough to prove innocence**.

The criteria for what can be considered proof can then be extended to the point of absurdity and to where, more importantly, all members of the public can be suspected of being a part of the 'unseen enemy', unless they 'prove' their innocence.

This proof usually takes the form of ridiculous or pointless displays of total obedience and conformity to whatever demands some authority is making in order to manipulate the public at the time.

This opens up a space where literally anything can be taken as a signal that the person is a member of the unseen enemy and denying it. When this happens a terrifying relationship can emerge between the arbiters of justice (the authorities) and the public.

In such situations, the authorities are permitted by the public to do 'whatever it takes' to exterminate the dreaded unseen enemy and to exact punishment for lack of conformity. Then, people are not only behaving in certain ways to avoid aiding or encouraging the unseen enemy but they are now behaving in certain ways to avoid punishment from authority:

> *the fear of the unseen enemy becomes subconsciously translated to the fear of what the authorities or society in general might do to you if they identify you as 'one of them'.*

People who don't conform to the last detail are scorned and punished by society, sometimes out of fear that they may legitimately be a member of the unseen enemy but sometimes out of fear of what the authorities and society in general might do if they suspect association.

The enemy becomes those who don't conform, whether or not they actually belong to the original unseen-enemy category.

Coronavirus has given governments a new opportunity to expand the category of the 'unseen enemy' to possibly include every member of the whole public.

This is reflected in the NHS propaganda campaign, where the slogan is a blunt order to 'act like you've got it' (or 'conform to our demands for new behaviours in order to prove that you are not infected or at least that you are doing your best not to be infected, lest you want to become suspect').

We are repeatedly told that any one of us may have it, which, if it exists, is true. However, whether this possibility justifies the totalitarian measures in response to it is the real question, regardless of whether anyone could have it or how many people it could kill.

What should we be more wary of, the possibility of being infected by a deadly virus or the possibility of permitting a totalitarian government takeover through unquestioning compliance to rules that violate long- held civil liberties?

A similar situation was achieved after 9/11, where any member of the public using public transport could be a radical Islamic terrorist and therefore the gradual redesign of airports to resemble total surveillance prisons was justified.

The Catholic Church brutalised medieval Europe for about a thousand years using 'the devil' as a kind of spiritual virus that could exist in anyone at any one time. In classic unseen-enemy fashion, those mandating conformity and obedience

against evil were the agents of evil themselves.

While, in the case of the War on Terror, those vowing to take revenge on the hidden enemy that was threatening to undermine freedom and liberal values oversaw the gradual and ongoing erosion of the tradition of civil liberty in the West.

Regardless of whether the unseen enemy in its various forms exists or has existed, I find it hard to imagine an enemy so dangerous that it permits a relinquishing of basic civil liberties and totalitarian control, not even a hidden totalitarian government itself.

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