

Max Lemuz

A Discovery of H(y)dden Evil with Austrian Economics

I. Jekyll, Hyde, and Action

“History repeats itself” is a mantra that has been, in many forms, repeated ad nauseam, often for the purpose of attempting to reveal historical truths. According to Ludwig von Mises, however, “There is no means to abstract from a historical experience a posteriori any theories or theorems concerning human conduct and policies” (41 Mises). This is not to say that historical analysis cannot be useful to humans, as the pattern-seeking beings we are, but that it is far less useful when considering the unforeseeable nature of individual human action.

Mr. Edward Hyde, the slouched, deformed alter ego of Dr. Henry Jekyll in Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” (henceforth referred to as DJMH) is often seen as a representation of the violent and animalistic tendencies that are kept repressed and under control by the mechanisms of our civilized society. Hyde is considered not only by critics, but by himself, as the epitome of evil, in his countenance, his intention, and most of all, his acts. Hyde’s actions throughout the story have important praxeological value, meaning they reveal a priori truths about the nature of human action, although these revelations are different than the typical conclusions that revolve around the many current discourses of Stevenson’s novella.

II. Current Discourse and an Alternative

Critical conversations around DJMH currently revolve around multiple discourses, most notably those of addiction, duality, and economics. Critic Patricia Comitini takes the stance that the greatest duality in Stevenson’s story is not Jekyll and Hyde, but Jekyll and Utterson.

Addiction has plagued Jekyll, and Utterson's inability to deal with that addiction places the two firmly in the medical discourse of addiction, one as addictable, and one as not, while Hyde himself embodies the addiction. "This dissymmetry between Utterson and Jekyll reveals the "other" modality of Victorian society: the subject who is empty of meaning, excessively desirous, and always consuming undignified pleasures. Utterson is the unaddictable subject of Victorian society; Jekyll is the other Victorian, who is inherently addictable" (Comitini 115). To Comitini, there is a clear delineation between Utterson and Jekyll. To those around him, Utterson has composure despite his own tendencies to indulge in substances. Adam Colman contributes to Comitini and complicates the discourse as he identifies many of the characters of Stevenson's story as addicts navigating through the mystery of Hyde until the materiality of his demise is realized. The addicts, most notably Utterson and Jekyll, "derive thrills from imaginatively crossing this private/ public boundary" (Colman 226), which to both men, mean completely different concepts. To both Utterson and Jekyll, Hyde is a driving force to continue their actions, but for Utterson, he wants to continue uncovering Hyde's mysteries while Jekyll wants to indulge in Hyde's pleasures. The physical movement that these addicts exhibit through Victorian London is optative, that is, is a hope for those individual but dually dichotomous drives. This duality is further discussed through discourses that seek to analyze what the Victorian monster was and what it could represent.

In "Liminimal: The Monster in Late Victorian Gothic Fiction," the idea of the Victorian monster is placed in the context of the burgeoning developments of evolutionary theory at the time. As the Victorian monster, Hyde is defined by his animality yet he is still human. He is on the border between the two which is a sociological term called liminality. "The

monstrous is readily imagined as animal insofar as the animal serves as an uncanny human double that simultaneously is and is not a human other” (Ortiz-Robles 13). Because of this liminality of the Victorian monster, Ortiz-Robles argues that creatures such as Hyde were a way to understand the emergence of biopower, a term referencing Michel Foucault and his theory of nation-states utilizing medical discourse to subjugate its people. Critic Erica Mccrystal takes a more character focused approach, as she takes a deep dive into what makes Hyde a monster. She cites his degenerative figure and uncaring brutishness as a reflection of the fears society has of those who might commit such acts. “Stevenson’s novel excels in establishing such oppositional forces but complicates them by putting “us” and “them” into one Jekyll/Hyde body that destabilizes notions of both human identity and social infrastructures” (Mccrystal 238). She compares Stevenson’s depiction of Hyde with subsequent reimaginations of him, from The Incredible Hulk to television iterations, and in making the comparison, she shows that newer iterations often portray the “Hyde” as a more complicated figure that acts as a good moral force. In this way, Hyde is deemed the embodiment of what society calls a “necessary evil;” an evil which is also documented by critics through an economic lens.

Drawing from Marxist theory, Benjamin O’Dell argues that the novella upholds the image of Victorian masculinity through the character of Mr. Utterson. Utterson breaks into Jekyll’s laboratory, thus depicting him as a measured gentleman who is willing to use force when necessary, while the house servants wait for him to arrive. O’Dell notes that “the animosity that plays out between classes in the public sphere, while palpable, fails to target the Victorian gentleman directly and is instead mediated by a reasonable center of debate: Mr. Utterson” (O’Dell 512). Because Utterson’s reasonableness contrasts and pacifies the servants’ anxieties,

O'Dell concludes that any class struggle that does occur fails to target the idea of the Victorian gentlemen, who were part of the bourgeoisie. Critic Ahmet Süner similarly sees Utterson as a composed figure, particularly in his countenance. Süner pays close attention to both Mr. Utterson and Hyde and places their physical attributes at opposing ends of an economic spectrum. For Süner, the countenance “of Utterson, which, as the very picture of common sense, is the gold standard of the symbolic economy of DJMH, and that of Hyde, which, as the representative of excessive and ineffable sense, works to undermine and destroy the same economy. While Utterson is a symbol of composure and stability, Hyde’s face is one of vagueness and regression which threatens the “stable” economy of the public that Utterson personifies.

In reviewing the conversations among these critics, despite the different discourses, there is a common thread in their conclusions. There are multiple dichotomies identified, whether it is between Utterson and Jekyll, Jekyll and Hyde, or the servants and the gentlemen. Whether the discourse is intentionally economic or not, the critics come from a foundation of Marxist theory in which class divisions between a working and owning class seem apparent, and provide a foundation for their criticisms. While the arguments these critics make have seeds of validity, the basis of using Marxist foundations call upon perceived historical categories and aim to reduce and generalize these categories into literature, which ultimately simplifies the complexity of human action. In his criticism, Paul Cantor remarks that “economics is a central realm of human activity, and to the extent that literature attempts to deal with human life, it must inevitably come to terms with economic issues (The Poetics of Spontaneous Order 7).” The analysis of human action in terms of preference, choice, and value are thus inherent, and the need to analyze Hyde’s actions as such will illuminate praxeological truths.

In the novella, there are three scenes that deserve primary focus in identifying how Mr. Hyde's actions reveal his economic values, and thus, universal ones: the trampling of the young girl, the murder of Sir Danvers Carew, and Henry Jekyll's statement. These are far from the only scenes that reveal fundamental economic features (all of them do), but for the sake of focus, I will be treating these scenes with utmost value. Because of the variety of discourses I researched, I will be melding the topics of addiction, surveillance, and politics into a cohesive argument that lends to an Austrian economic reading of the text. While there might seem to be similarities in this critical reading to poststructuralism (Foucault, historicism, biopolitics, etc.), this approach disregards the typical Marxist economic foundations in favor of Austrian economics. In this paper, I will argue that the novel's treatment of Jekyll as an addict stigmatizes addiction because it overlooks a more pernicious evil than Hyde's random acts of violence: that of institutionalized State violence.

III. Jekyll, the Addict. Hyde, the Addiction

Hyde is first introduced through the narration of Mr. Enfield to Utterson, as Mr. Enfield recalls the time he witnessed Hyde running into a young girl at the corner of a sidewalk and proceeding to step on and over the girl with no seeming care. Before the act takes place, however, Mr. Enfield gets "into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman" (Stevenson 35). The atmosphere of the setting and Hyde's impending approach gives Enfield the feeling of being justified in calling State authorities, even before Hyde has committed any crime. Enfield, being a friend of the legal State apparatus—Utterson—he feels protected by the special privileges granted to State officials. As Murray Rothbard points out, "The police, who are supposed to guard us against... crime, are a

compulsory monopoly of the government” (Rothbard 90). Crime, however, is something that Hyde had yet to commit. When he does though, his interaction with Enfield and the girl’s family subverts the expectations of what an evil man might do.

He doesn’t run or try to hide, but when accosted by Enfield, Mr. Hyde reasons with his victims in the form of voluntary exchange. Despite the mob’s threat that they could “make such a scandal out of” (Stevenson 35) the incident, they nevertheless acquiesce to reasoning with Hyde, although their demeanor is important to note. Enfield explains that he “never saw a circle of such hateful faces; and there was the man in the middle,” (35). As a personification of Jekyll’s addiction, the crowd turned their most hateful gazes upon his disease and trapped it, not recognizing any illness but only having contempt. Nevertheless, Hyde agrees to a payment of restitution. At this point, some critics seem to place a negative value judgment on Enfield for casually accepting this payment, however, it must be noted that the victim’s family was the ultimate receiver and thus accepted Hyde’s deal as opposed to either making the incident official police business or dragging Hyde’s name through the mud. In some contradiction to their mere hateful looks, the actions of the victim’s family becomes one of understanding as far as accepting a voluntary market exchange.

“And the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of proprieties, celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good” (36) Enfield tells Utterson as he contrasts Hyde with Dr. Jekyll, the guarantor of Hyde’s cheque and a man with a reputation of being “good.” This goodness is a valuation that comes from the mob mentality of Enfield and is endorsed by Utterson, who is a friend of his as well. At this point, neither Enfield nor Utterson nor the rest of the mob know about Jekyll’s malady, and this ignorance represents a

collective ignorance towards the plight of the addict. Just as Enfield felt the need to call upon the State before their encounter, the collective need to treat addiction as criminality is present.

To clarify, this is not to say that Hyde is any paragon of virtue. He is far from it, and his actions of initiatory violence speak loudly, however, the traditional conception of Hyde as evil incarnate seems misguided.

IV. Hyde, the Seen. State, the Hidden

As Enfield's want for a State presence was established through his story, that presence is realized in the most dreary of nights in London when Sir Danvers Carew is walking the streets. Instead of Enfield, however, the narrative is framed through the perspective of a maid's servant who overlooks the scene of the murder from her high window. No matter perceived class divisions based on wealth, the narrative is framed of being partial to the State apparatus. Anna Lepine notes that "Hyde is an evil hidden in plain sight, invisible to the community's members exactly because he is known to them. Watching its borders to keep evil out, the community does not observe the evil within its midst or, when it does, it protects the offender" (Lepine 82). But Parliament member Carew seems to be the one protected by the maid servant's framing in this scene.

As Carew walks down the moonlit street, the maid servant's bias is exposed. Before even paying much of attention to Hyde, the maid servant is already enamored with the member of Parliament. "And the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content" (Stevenson 47). The maid servant draws on a historical conception of the role of the

State as an equalizer. His kindness is based in a far reaching tradition, and his countenance is a calming presence, just as it might have been for Enfield.

Looking at Sir Danvers and his position in the State apparatus, however, contextualizes the horrifying violence that Hyde inflicts upon him. During the period in which DJMH was written, Gail Turley Houston cites the increasing accountability problems and reliance on fiat currency as a contributor to England's "Great Depression." These symptoms are characteristic of the overall problem of the State monopolizing currency and centralizing authority. "In 1887, H.D. Macleod asserted to Parliament that using credit instead of money illustrated the Victorians had become increasingly civilized" (Houston 101). Just as Hyde is associated with incivility while Danvers is the peak of gentlemen, the reliance of credit that Danvers symbolizes is anything but civilized for the men and women like the maid servant that are most affected by economic depressions. However, to attribute Hyde's violence to an altruistic defense of victims of depression government policies would be a stretch. As Jekyll admits, Hyde is selfish and values his own self preservation over collective civility or interests. When Hyde kills Carew, he must be doing it in his own interest. But why then kill Carew, the beloved gentleman of Parliament?

Carew represents the legislative arm of the Victorian State, and as he holds that power to legislate, so has there been a history of attempts, both unsuccessful and not, to legislate away victimless vice and sin, of which Jekyll's substance addiction applies. Of course, this is not accounting for the actual violence that Hyde commits, but the initial problem of substance abuse that Jekyll and many others to this day suffer from. The State's predilection, from before the Victorian period onwards, has been to try to legislate away violence by attacking what is seen to

be its historical cause. Murray Rothbard explains the nature of the State in relation to substance abuse:

The case for outlawing any product or activity is essentially the same twofold argument we have seen used to justify the compulsory commitment of mental patients: it will harm the person involved, or it will lead that person to commit crimes against others. It is curious that the general—and justified—horror of drugs has led the mass of the public to an irrational enthusiasm for outlawing them. The case against outlawing narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs is far weaker than the case against Prohibition, an experiment which the grisly era of the 1920s has hopefully discredited for all time... and outlawing something because it may harm the user leads straight down the logical garden path to our totalitarian cage.” (Rothbard 136)

As an addict struggling to stay alive and continue his deviant ways without rebuke, Jekyll’s addiction, Hyde, kills Carew due to self interest. The observing servant maid cannot and does not see what Carew represents and how his power has translated to depression and authoritarianism. In Rothbard’s example of American Prohibition, the legislature was successful in passing a prohibition which proved to be unsuccessful in curbing negative externalities related to alcohol, as it only exacerbated them. But Victorian England was different, and the legislature that put forth bills criminalizing alcohol failed to pass. Hyde represents the strength of Victorian England’s animosity toward such measures, despite the State seeming like both victim and savior to the novella’s characters.

When Hyde finally does commit the murder, his symbolic act of resistance against an authoritarian State is portrayed the brutality and horror that is described in the scene. “Hyde

broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway” (Stevenson 48). To beat Sir Danvers Carew to the bone was not just to kill the outward man, but to destroy the foundations of which the man stood for as a privileged member of the State. Hyde’s villainy isn’t just an evil hidden in plain sight as Lepine suggests. Hyde is not an evil hidden at all, but simply evil in its most base form. The hidden evil comes not from Hyde but the bigger evil, which is that evil that calls upon the State to take care of those that are plagued by addiction.

Hyde wasn’t simply plagued with addiction though. He was a bad man, the total embodiment of how bad addiction can be, and any violence in defense of his own would have been just. In praxeological terms, Hyde’s actions reflect Jekyll’s preference for violence as his substance abuse becomes worse. When Utterson identifies Carew as the victim, he says that he is “sorry to say that this is Sir Danvers Carew” (48) Utterson, as a lawyer and part of the judiciary, has a closeness to his legislative friend, and expresses regret to have lost him. The solidarity that Utterson expresses reflects the need to increase centralization of power, because as Hyde represents the decentralizing randomness, the fear in both Utterson’s camp and those of servants and otherwise come to fear Hyde.

An objection might be raised that this analysis is looking dichotomous in its delineation between State actors and the rest despite earlier criticisms of that logic in accordance to Marxism. My intention, however, isn’t to create hard divisions between the two. Utterson, for example, is acknowledged by critics as somewhat of an addict in his own right. The mystery that he chases is addictive, however, and not seen by broader society as a negative. But if he had a

similar addiction, that wouldn't necessarily stop the State from using him as a tool of fear as well, and thus, those bounds are much more fluid and defined only by the power in which they control a legally sanctioned use of force.

V. Words vs. Action and What it All Means

After Utterson breaks into the door where Hyde holed himself in, the story doesn't end. The final section of the novella is a statement accounting for Jekyll's life and explaining how he devolved into Hyde. But what is the value of Jekyll's statement as compared to Hyde's and his own actions? While reflecting on his faults he identifies them as "a certain gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high... Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures" (Stevenson 75). In this, Jekyll dissociates himself from Hyde by mentioning his prime fault not of brutality or murder, but of wanting to be happy in his own way. But what is unclear is to the nature of what is making him happy out on the streets. There are implications of a sexual nature, however, there is no overt declaration as to what street vices Jekyll gets satisfaction from.

The vagueness is an important aspect, as it is a universalizing descriptor. No matter what the initial vices that drive Jekyll, it seems that they are some victimless crime that only leads to occasional violent acts (only two of which are clearly explicated) when Hyde comes into the view of those who immediately turn to State force. This is emblematic of the addict or the delinquent, as the State has criminalized them through law, and resistance to those edicts becomes criminality.

Most notable about Jekyll's statement is how he describes Hyde. As mentioned before, he creates a clear line between the two, yet the addiction and the addict are difficult to separate, as

they have a causal relationship. “That child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred” (87), wrote Jekyll. Jekyll’s statement is hyperbole, but even the essence of his words seem counter to his being. As shown in previous sections, there have been clear examples of humanity in Hyde, as he reasoned with his victim’s family and even when he kills Carew in reaction to the political force he represents. While possibly morally dubious, Jekyll does not adequately explain how those actions are devoid of humanity. If anything, Jekyll’s being proves Hyde’s humanity, and his statement doesn’t completely coincide with his words. As Mises explains the difference between pronouncements and actions in terms of economics, he writes that “[t]o express wishes and hopes and to announce planned action may be forms of action in so far as they aim in themselves at the realization of a certain purpose. But they must not be confused with the actions to which they refer” (Mises 12). Because Hyde’s actions don’t match Jekyll’s pronouncements and explanations, there lies a distinct division between the two, although not to the effect where Hyde is no longer human.

In reality, Jekyll and Hyde are not a dimorphous split as some believe, as Hyde is an aspect of Jekyll. Thus, Jekyll is the whole man and Hyde is a fraction. When Jekyll tries explaining that “man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens” (Stevenson 75), he is illuminating a praxeological truth of human action which states that humans act purposefully, and on the individual level, they do so in a manner that cannot be reliably predicted. Not only was Hyde an aspect of Jekyll, but he implied that there are other aspects as well. While Hyde was the rash, brutal, amoral monster, there might be fractional parts that are his goodness, generosity, and sorrow. This lends to the heart of a fundamental aspect of economics, which is how valuation works. With the multi-fractional parts

of Jekyll, they all, like Hyde, value things differently. This subject theory of value is portrayed through the individual Jekyll due to his fractional parts, but it also shows that an individual's values can change with time, emotion, and context.

Similarly, human action in the macro sense can be seen the same way. The individual Utterson has different values from that of Enfield, Jekyll, and the other characters that inhabit Victorian society. The monster trope that Jekyll perpetuates when he describes Hyde as "that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair" (79) reflects a lack of accountability that Jekyll wants to take. Even though society may have been against his way of life and his predilections, Jekyll was sick and didn't get proper treatment for that sickness. Jekyll lost trust in his own self to be capable of any reformation, his addict's plight is metaphorically congruous with that of addicts of real substances. Paul Cantor, when writing of *The Invisible Man*, explains "[h]e thus takes his place in a line of literary portrayals of mad scientists that stretches back to Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, the prototype of the man who isolates himself from his fellows to pursue an ambitious project and in the process loses his humanity, unleashing forces he can neither truly understand nor control" (*The Invisible Man and the Invisible Hand* 294). Similar to the *Invisible Man*, Hyde takes precedence in that long line of "monsters," which creates a sense of othering from humanity. It is that distance that both characters in the novella and readers alike try to create where the fear and truth of the novella lies.

Despite the attempts at disassociation with Hyde, he is not completely a monster, due to the fact that he represents the very human illness of addiction while also displaying sometimes human reasoning, both economic and political. His stoic reasoning in voluntary exchange with

the young girl's family was ugly to the common man and reader alike, but it wasn't inhuman. His arguably political killing of Danvers Carew was immoral, but again, not inhuman to any degree in which would be unrecognizable if someone in real life did such a thing. Thus the fear in associating Hyde with humanity contributes to the addict othering, and foments the willingness of the State to intervene in the way that the State does: through violence.

The hidden evil is then not Hyde, as it has been shown that his evils were able to be controlled and tempered by Utterson, but more importantly, himself. When he takes his own life before the authorities arrive, he admits his guilt and the error of his ways. Jekyll states that he does "not suppose that, when a drunkard reasons with himself upon his vice, he is once out of five hundred times affected by the dangers that he runs through his brutish, physical insensibility" (Stevenson 84). Probability then becomes the point in question. Does society need to use the State to attack vices like drinking because it could potentially lead to negative externalities. Some of the characters, and those readers that cave to the fear might say "yes," however, when the State exerts its power or the threat thereof, there is a lack of attention paid and even admiration, as the novella shows. The hidden evil is not Hyde, but the State that devalues currencies and monopolizes violence, and does so often without regard for wealth or status. The blind admiration for State intervention is a fear truly hidden, but discoverable by the basic principles of praxeology and Austrian economics as a whole.

In some ways, Austrian economic theory is Jekyll, fundamentally human yet uncomfortable to many because it reveals truths about the nature of human action, its randomness and purposefulness. And all the while, Marxist theory thrives, as the State does,

underlying and ever present, yet it lacks those fundamental human truths and too often aims to generalize in order to deride one perceived “class” over another.

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