

FIXATION, OBSESSION, OR PERVERSION?

A SPECULATIVE NONPARAMETRIC STATICAL ANALYSIS

OF NASCENT PROTOPARADIGMATIC PRAXIOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES:

A DISQUISITION IN LIEU OF A DISSERTATION

by Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

4 Ranch Lane

Saint Louis, Missouri

63131

Phone: (314) 966-2167

"IT'S AN IN HOOK!" Thus the loud voice would smite every proximal eardrum, before that voice's attendant body would move to the next vehicle. Whereupon an enthusiastic finger would point, and the voice would yell, "LOOK! THIS ONE'S AN OUT HOOK! AN OUT HOOK THIS TIME!"

The two indulgent parents would smile, exclaim, bend down to look, try to share the enthusiasm, smile at this cute little boy, then hurry after him, guarding the safety of that busy small body as he continued to scamper from one vehicle to the next while the family crossed the parking lot.

This little boy—namely, Marion Baumli Sudvarg—was indulging his latest (and, as it would prove, quite

prolonged) passion. This particular passion was an interest in "in hooks" and "out hooks." The purpose of this treatise shall be to elucidate and illustrate the nature, the cause, and the course (or curse?) of this passion.

First, let it be noted that the exposition here set forth (blithely evoked, i.e., provoked, and therefore redeemingly pedantic) must proceed with the most careful of analyses, utilizing both an unstinting economy of words along with a high degree of specificity about any manifold of meanings. It follows that the terminology here used warrants some explaining since "in hooks" and "out hooks" were the nuclear nouns of the fixation we here examine.

Attached to some vehicles, especially to SUVs and pickups, at the rear bumper is a towbar for pulling a trailer (or occasionally another vehicle, or machine). These towbars usually have a hole in them, and a person attaches the trailer (or other vehicle or machine) using either a bolt (usually called a hitch pin or a hitch bolt) or a clevis, by inserting this through two holes in the trailer's "tongue" which overlap the hole in the towbar. This towbar, with a hole, was by Marion

called an "in hook." Other towbars have a ball, often chrome plated, which is called either a trailer hitch or a bumper hitch. The ball is screwed onto the top of a threaded bolt, or is welded atop a bolt, or is cast or machined as part of that bolt, and the bolt is inserted down through one of the towbar's holes. These trailer hitches work by having a rounded fastener, already attached to the end of the "tongue" of what is being towed, set down over the ball. This rounded fastener, called a "palm" or coupler, after being placed over the ball is tightened and held in place with a clamp or cinch pin. These rounded trailer hitches, in Marion's terminology, were called "out hooks." Occasionally, a vehicle (usually a pickup) would have a wide hitch assembly, or towbar, with as many as three holes in it. These holes might be filled with different round trailer hitches, each a different size, hence evoking the exclamation, "AND LOOK! HERE ARE THREE OUT HOOKS! THREE OUT HOOKS ALL DIFFERENT SIZES AND ALL TOGETHER!" These amply endowed towbars, just as likely, might possess one trailer hitch with two unused holes, eliciting the exclamation, "THIS ONE

HAS ONE OUT HOOK AND TWO IN HOOKS! LOOK MOMMY AND DADDY! TWO IN HOOKS AND ONE OUT HOOK!"

A long saga this adventure could be, if the parking lot were full and the parents had to park a considerable distance (many vehicles away) from their destination. And a long span of time this child's fixation would, over the years (yes; years) prove to occupy. It lasted from when Marion was about twenty months old until he was almost five. At which time this fixation gave over to his next one, which would be an avid interest in limousines. This latter fixation burgeoned and blossomed until, before he was ten years old, Marion probably knew more about limousines than anyone in the world.

But let us not begin a foray into the psychical terrain of the later limousine fixation. Let us stay with, and scrutinize, that first fixation. From whence did the fascination with "in hooks" and "out hooks" come? Likely its origin, to some extent at least, involved a parental etiology. The two parents at issue (of issue?), having "liberationist" leanings regarding gender roles, desired that Marion's interest in "masculine" things involve matters other than sports

and guns. With this in mind they had taken the course of encouraging, and thereby inculcating, an early interest in road-building machinery and trucks. Books on these subjects were purchased and read together, construction sites nearby or along highways warranted much comment and, if time allowed, prolonged viewing. Soon this fanciful interest became a part of Marion's play as he began spending increasing amounts of time with his toy earthmoving equipment and trucks. This play grew more focused as Marion became interested in the concept, practice, and praxis of "towing." Acting out this ideation, he might arrange as many as fifty small cars, trucks, and road-building machines, all lined up in his room, hitched in various ways to one another so as to form a row around three sides of the small room.

The metamorphosis from play to passion, and then to fixation (perhaps even obsession—or perversion?), was unswerving and swift. Three weeks of Marion playing "tow" in his room gave way to three years of exclamations, accompanied by enthusiastic gesticulations and descriptions of "in hooks" and "out hooks," their several combinations, and also their

baffling variations, e.g., "WHAT IS THIS? IS THIS AN IN HOOK OR AN OUT HOOK OR BOTH?!" He first said this while pointing to a protruding rectangular tube which appeared as though it were made to accept a similar tube whose external dimensions would match the internal dimensions of the protruding appendage in question. Eventually this question would be answered by an empirical example: the family discovered that a long rectangle of steel protruding from the frame of a trailer, inserted into the enfolding rectangle of the vehicle's hitch, was designed for less flexibility of movement, thus to allow the trailer, at the hitch point, to pivot only slightly in order to prevent the trailer from swaying so much as to affect the road stability of the towing vehicle. The trailer being towed was fastened to the towing vehicle by a bolt or hitch pin which inserted through holes which lined up between the inserted rectangular "tongue" and the rectangular "receiver" mounted to the towing vehicle. This bolt or pin might be inserted from the top, but it often was inserted laterally from the side. Often, but not always, used in this hitch assembly were also two chains (for added safety) which bound the trailer

either to the bumper or to the main frame of the towing vehicle. A bit of research would reveal that this assembly is called a "box hitch," but Marion's satisfied way of summing up this mystery was, "IT'S AN IN HOOK UNTIL THE TRAILER IS HOOKED UP AND THEN IT'S AN OUT HOOK!!"

The subject's behavior in this realm of "in hooks" and "out hooks" was (predictably) observed as, and pronounced as, "cute" by his indulgent parents. And this loud behavior (not unseemly in a child) was seemingly entertaining to passersby also. However, after the passage of about one year the monody did begin to tire—not only the parents but also onlookers and even indulgent grandparents. Marion, however, did not tire, and as time and events would prove, never would. Rather, his interest waned even more abruptly than it had waxed. The interest evaporated—disappeared; i.e., it seemed that Marion had not at all tired of the topic, he merely abandoned it.

As already described, Marion Baumli Sudvarg then embraced a new fixation. This one also involved machines, but the machines—limousines, as they are called—were considerably more elaborate than those

relatively simple (even primitive, from a machine physics point of view) contraptions of his earlier fixation. This new fascination, or fixation, would last considerably more years than the span of that first fixation; in fact, this fixation with limousines lasted until Marion was eleven and one-half years old, i.e., a full seven years! And then there presented even a third fixation—this one also involving vehicles. Now, however, the subject was more varied: Marion, as the family rode in their car, would occupy himself with identifying the make, model, and virtues of each and every car on the road. This third fascination was of shorter duration than the first two, lasting a little less than two years. It then gave over to what appears to be a replacement fixation, but about this one, the subject (departing from the defining variables of public descriptions and exclamatory expenditure which accompanied his two earlier immersions) now appears to have radically averted his perceptive foci, thus diverting his interests away from the world of machines. Now he is oriented, instead, toward what can only be described as a very different realm which would appear to involve either pseudosempiternal abstractions

of an extremely remote echelon, or quasireified contemplative cerebrations which are equally remote precisely because they are ineffable.

The unanswered question, meanwhile, remains: From whence did that initial fixation with "in hooks" and "out hooks" emanate? While explaining this on the basis of an earlier interest in machines and towing does point (in a crude, because ostensive, way) to a precursor, this method is too elementary, meager, and parsimonious to demarcate a genesis. Moreover, the act of noting that a later, similarly enthusiastic fixation with limousines enjoyed a lengthy reign (sic), is merely to observe that this child at a later age fell in love with large, sleek, attractive cars ... a not surprising proclivity given that it seems similar to what many an adult of our modern culture surely has done (and likely a few children also). Thus, with regard to this dualistic (perhaps antinomial?) gestalt of "in hooks" and "out hooks," amounting to a fixation so prolonged, obsessive, and apparently self-perpetuating that one would almost be tempted to term it a Weltanschauung (however mutable it might, in the eventual course of this circumscribed, virtually

solipsistic, solitary "cerebral culture" finally prove to be), we can discern and understand the before and after of its substantiation, even while explaining its particulars so graphically and thoroughly as to ensure that it possesses self-vouchsafing veridicality, but we have in no way thereby succeeded in explaining the etiology of this interest or its considerable prolongation—amounting to an abiding fascination which was simple, mundane, and (eventually, though not initially) quintessentially boring to all but the subject himself. Why an upsurge of such unflagging interest and enthusiasm for "in hooks" and "out hooks"? Why a virtual mini-cosmology of verbal expostulations, gesticulated enthusiasm, and exploratory kinesis? Was all this the manifestation of a rare but, in this case, ripe sublimbic archetype lurking deep in the unconscious—ready, in this case, to precociously come forth, manifesting, in this early appearance, what in other persons' later years is perhaps similar to (even, once matured, identical to) the urge to scale a mountain ("because it's there")—here at this early stage, as of yet only an avid interest in "out hooks," and the impulse to enter the bowels of a cave ("because

it isn't there")—here at this early stage, as of yet only a busy, concretized interest in "in hooks"? Or was it perchance nothing more elaborate than a child's realizing that there are available definiens by which to symbolically approach, then apperceive, next apprehend, and finally grasp with full cognitive comprehension the weight of future dutiful responsibilities which the biologic individual has toward those corporeal synechistic enmeshings necessary for the durability, qua duration, of the human species? Or was it (on a very different plane) the metaphysical, if elementary, stirrings of mystical awareness as yet mystagogically fettered by the distractions of the material world, embracing a reciprocity of illusory appearances: the "out hook" as metaphysical beingness and the "in hook" as metaphysical nothingness, this child bravely absorbing the two-fold dichotomy (not necessarily a redundancy, this phrase!), with these "hooks" serving as an approximated (not proximal) instantiation of this pluralistic world, our subject doing all this with an overt enthusiasm which, internally however, was actually a brave equanimity made verbally manifest as this as yet youthful soul

repeated categories perhaps initially chosen with but vague awareness of their beckoning meaning, until this repetition became a telic tendency that would one day be avowed with a fervor constituting, in effect, a practical teleology made manifest and unassailable as these random beginnings took on structure: namely, a structure through the continued repetition of the "game" (as those adults of a pedestrian mentality might describe it) of exclaiming about "in hooks" and "out hooks," this practice eventually serving the purpose of purging the mind of cognitive clutter, thus preparing it for a future state of mindless, mystical, spiritual purity?

These several questions all point to (even deepen, while elucidating rather than solving!) no small degree of crucial mystery. Some mysteries are, admittedly, more profound than others. But all mysteries, whether shallow or profound, deserve, if not deep meditation, then at least some degree of idle fondling. To wit: This writer, having thus writ, admits that with regard to the mystery under present scrutiny, he has not at all plumbed it. Rather, he has dallied with it. Which surely is as much as the subject actually deserves.

But perhaps one should not be quick to judge that the dimensions of a subject matter are puny. From the perspective of a scholar, our topic may seem paltry or small. For a psychologist, the matter may seem too aberrant (a very peevish protest!) to warrant serious study. And a philosopher might prefer to dismiss it as overly mundane. But if in the mind of a child these ideas have a symbiology with determinate defining boundaries, i.e., if these ideas retain their raw existence along with their horizon of meaning, thus possessing an importance so rarefied as to suggest something of the highest ontic aspirations and proclivities (if not actual ontological status), then perhaps it is our duty—to ourselves—to put aside concerns about the subject matter's supposedly small dimensions and instead merely appreciate (that is to say, behold without judging) the innocent enthusiasm of this child and welcome it as a modest, undeliberated, unimposing (however impositional) act of generous (if unintentional) benevolence. A benevolence which, albeit temporary in its here-examined manifestation, was nevertheless resplendent, beauteous, abundant—succeeding at being all this because it engendered an

increase of parental patience, focused and transfixed that patience into one more vehicle for the expression of prideful (if puzzled) love, and so became an integral part of the collective memory of familial reminiscing. That collective memory, by the present time, having produced a triune progeny: well warranted conversational banter, occasional worries that certain of Marion's current fascinations could become new fixations, and one transubstantiated embodiment in the memorabilia of nostalgic prose.

(Written: early February, 2005.)
(Posted: August 21, 2012.)

(This paper was an assignment for parents by Ms. Liberton, Marion's 8th grade English teacher. Its final draft was written 2-13-2005. Obviously, the style was purposefully academic, pedantic, hortatory—and humorous. Only thus could I take the assignment seriously. Especially given that I never could quite understand what the assignment actually was supposed to be. Something involving an anecdote about my son as a small child which would be nostalgically amusing.)