SAMPLE LEARNING ANALYSIS A – VERY WELL DONE WITH A FEW LIMITATIONS

A few weeks ago when I was at work at Primary Children’s residential treatment center, I discovered that one of our kids, a 6-year-old girl, had broken a rule concerning items she was not allowed to have in her room. The other staff and I had decided that an appropriate consequence for this would be having the girl sit away for an hour. Typically, for that offense, the kids sit away for 4 hours, but we decided to go easy because of her still-developing cognitive awareness. When I took the girl aside and told her what we had decided, she began to escalate because she apparently didn’t know that rule. The whole situation ended with her in the time-out room, banging on the door and walls, screaming at me every obscene, insulting name she—or I, for that matter—could think of, and trying to flip me off (she picked the wrong finger). While it is a little extreme (as things in the psychiatric setting tend to be), to me, this is an example of someone seeking revenge. In this girl’s mind, I had made up this rule just so I could make her sit away. Of course, I hated her, and I wanted her to miss out on free time. There were Barbies whose hair needed to be brushed, melty beads\(^1\) to do, and games to play! And it was all my fault that she was going to miss that. So, after she pegged me as the one responsible, she tried to get back at me for, in her mind, unfairly making her miss free time.

This is just one example of revenge. Revenge seems to be pervasive in human interaction. It can occur on a large scale, such as when two countries or, more commonly, two militant groups take turns firing missiles at each other. It can also occur on a small scale, as this girl singles me out and shouts obscenities at me. It can occur in the privacy of homes, or on national television, as when political candidates fire attack ads back and forth at each other every four years. It occurs between the old and the young, between men and women, and across the globe. Because revenge is so persistent, I think it is important that we do all we can to understand it.

\(^1\) Little beads you put on pegs on a plastic shape and then melt with an iron. This is a favorite pastime of the kids at work.
It is partly because of this importance that the quote I chose to analyze focuses on the structure of revenge. The other reason I chose it is the considerable insight it provided into a social construct I view daily. When I have kids singling me out as the object of their vengeance as that 6-year-old girl did, I think it’s important that I learn as much about revenge as possible so I don’t engage with them and continue the cycle. The quote that gave me the insight is: “Because of the magnitude gap, victims will maximize their own suffering and perpetrators will minimize the harm they inflict. And so each time they exchange roles, they will think that there are unpaid debts that call for ever more severe retribution.”2 The main way in which this quote enlightened me is how it describes the structure of revenge and the relationship between the “unpaid debts” and “retribution” that causes revenge to be perpetuated by those who participate in it. I also learned a great deal about how the magnitude gap contributes to the cycle of revenge. The magnitude gap, which is the tendency of the victim to see the act of violence as more hurtful than the perpetrator also plays an important part in revenge in that it is crucial to the development of the “unpaid debts.”

The pieces of the quote that I will examine are in the phrase “they will think that there are unpaid debts that call for ever more severe retribution”. The part I will analyze first is “unpaid debts”. This phrase gave me insight into what must happen for the cycle of revenge to occur. Specifically, an unpaid debt must be present for an act of retribution to occur. Something I learned about this debt from the concept of the magnitude gap is that it is only perceived by the victim. As Beck mentions in Prisoners of Hate, “the disciplinarian or the punisher is often oblivious to the long-term impact of the pain inflicted on the ‘offender’...the target of our reproach, however, is hurt and builds up a grievance against us,”3 Beck beautifully describes how this discrepancy leads to the existence of a perceived debt for the victim.

---


For the perpetrator, the act of retribution may be viewed as justified. Before that person switched roles and became the perpetrator, he or she was the victim. As the victim, that person suffered, and so views any retribution towards their perpetrator as justified. These differing points of view and the inequality between what the perpetrator gains and what the victim suffers contribute to the development of the unpaid debt in the Beaumeister quote.

Understanding the concept of these unpaid debts increases my understanding of the whole quote because it shows me that this part of revenge is in only one party’s mind. Because the quote focuses primarily on revenge, being able to generalize this idea to revenge as a general concept increases my comprehension of the quote. Revenge, then, as a whole, is characterized by a lack of empathy or an inability to take another person’s point of view. If I empathize with another person, I am not likely to strike out at them; empathy typically leads to understanding, which does not typically lead to continued violence. Therefore, by understanding this one-sided nature of the “unpaid debt,” I am able to generalize this lack of empathy to situations of revenge as a whole.

The second part of the phrase that I will consider is “ever more severe retribution.” While the magnitude gap causes the victim to perceive a debt, it also contributes to the increased severity of retribution. Because victims suffer more than perpetrators gain, when the victim strikes back, his or her retribution will exceed the original transgression in severity. This occurs because in the original transgression, the act seems much more severe to the victim than to the perpetrator. As a result, the victim will have to act more severely to “pay back” what he or she had to suffer. When the victim’s victim perpetrates him or her in response, his or her act of retribution will be even more severe. In this way, the magnitude gap causes retributive responses to become ever more severe every time the victim and the perpetrator switch roles.

---

4 “The social problem with revenge is that retaliations will tend to exceed the original transgressions, often by a great deal.” [Baumeister, Roy F. (1999). “Egotism and revenge” in Evil. New York: W.H. Freeman, 160]
Understanding the concept of “ever more severe retribution” increases my comprehension of the whole quote because the increasing retribution in a central part of the revenge described in this quote. Without the ever more increasing vengeance and the increased suffering of the victim that occurs with it, revenge would not cycle the way it does. Therefore, because the escalating acts of retribution are so central to the structure of how revenge cycles, understanding it increases my understanding of the whole of revenge that the quote describes.

The way in which the “ever more severe retribution” and the “unpaid debts” are related is in a positive feedback loop of mutual causality. Retribution causes unpaid debts for the victim because he or she has to suffer more than the perpetrator gains. What the perpetrator sees as justified or minimal is seen as unwarranted and extreme by the victim. Because of this, the retribution causes the victim to form a debt. The debt perceived by the victim, in turn, causes him or her to act in retribution. In this way, the retribution causes the debt, and the debt causes the retribution. Each factor causes the other. Because the magnitude gap leads to greater retribution each time the victim and the perpetrator switch roles, the cycle of revenge can spiral out of control into ever more deadly and desperate acts.

By understanding the feedback loop that creates the relationship between the unpaid debts and the ever more severe retribution, I understand the mechanism that makes revenge tick and that makes it go. Without this feedback loop, revenge would be at stagnation. If the feedback loop did not exist, the acts of retribution would not increase in severity. If the acts of retribution did not increase in severity, there would be no need for retribution because there would be no perceived unpaid debt on the part of the victim. In the relationship of mutual causality that the debt and the retribution share, if there is one without the other, the cycle of revenge would not continue. Therefore, because this feedback loop is so crucial to revenge, understanding it helps me understand how the revenge Beaumeister describes works.

To help me better understand the quote, I used the dictionary to discover definitions that broaden and deepen my understanding of the quote. The word I chose to look up was
“retribution.” This word is relevant to my understanding of Beaumeister’s quote on revenge because retribution is such a crucial part of revenge. First, it is the main actor in revenge. The concept of unpaid debts is important too, but while the debts are a construct in the mind of the victim, retribution is an existent act that helps define the relationship between those involved. Therefore, retribution is an active part of revenge. Additionally, as I mentioned before, retribution is crucial to the mutual causality of the feedback loop and as a result is important to the structure of revenge. Because of the active nature of retribution and the vital role it plays in the feedback loop, looking up definitions of it is relevant to my understanding of this quote on the cycle of revenge.

I looked up two definitions and one synonym for the word “retribution.” The first definition I found described retribution as “punishment inflicted in the spirit of moral outrage or personal vengeance.” The way that this described the emotional state someone is in (“the spirit of moral outrage”) when he or she acts in retribution helped me to better understand the feelings of those involved. Because I am able to be aware of the emotions of those who engage in revenge, this definition deepened my understanding of what it means to act in retribution. Additionally, I am able to better empathize with those involved.

The second definition I found did not focus on the emotions implicated in vengeance. Instead, it described retribution as “something given or demanded in repayment, especially punishment.” The reason I chose this definition was its use of the word “demanded.” This word caused me to connect the idea of retribution to a different Beaumeister quote: “In revenge, the perpetrator is inflicting harm to reach a certain level of satisfaction, and the victim has to suffer enough (assuming that’s possible) to provide satisfaction.” The word “demanded” enabled me

---


to connect this idea with the primary quote I had chosen because I came to realize that when, in retribution, the perpetrator is demanding something from the victim, it is satisfaction that he or she is demanding. By this making it possible for me to connect these two ideas, this quotation deepened my understanding of the quote I am analyzing about revenge. It deepened my knowledge rather than broadened it because the secondary quotation gives me a deeper understanding of my primary one.

The synonym I chose to use was punishment. The concept of punishment as a synonym for retribution made me think that when someone engages in retribution, he or she views the intended victim as somehow inferior to the self. The thing that immediately comes to mind for the word punishment is something a parent does to his or her child when that child has misbehaved. The word implies that the punisher somehow has authority over the receiver of the punishment. If taken too far, which is likely to happen in situations such as revenge where there is a great deal of emotion involved, the intended victim may become viewed as inferior to the perpetrator. From inferior, it is only a small step to viewing the victim as less than human. Because of this, I came to understand how it is that perpetrators can act so cruelly towards their victims. If the victim is viewed as inferior enough to be sub-human, then it makes sense that the perpetrator would not treat him or her humanely. Because “punishment” facilitated me to understand a possible reason why perpetrators are able to do the cruel things that they do, this synonym deepened my understanding of the people involved in revenge that is described by Beaumeister.

While I was analyzing the parts of my quote and the definitions I chose, my ideas changed in several ways. In regard to the ideas from the quotation, I had not before considered that the discrepancy between what the victim loses and the perpetrator gains would play a role in the increasing severity of retribution.

---

One idea that I did have, however, was that of relative evil. Since my teenage years, I have come to believe that those who commit acts of evil do not believe themselves to be evil. When I was in middle school, I remember watching one of the Lord of the Rings movies with my friends. After the movie, I remember discussing whether or not Sauron (the main antagonist) viewed himself as evil. This concept of relative evil is related to the magnitude gap because it is similar to the fact that “offenses seem much greater to the victim than to the perpetrator.”9 Therefore, while the act of revenge may seem like “evil” to the victim, the perpetrator likely does not view it as such.

I began to endorse the idea of relative evil at least partly due to an interest in philosophy that developed when I was a teenager. Somewhere I came across a description of Platonian morality that described it like this: if a woman steals a piece of bread, the good she gets from feeding herself or children outweighs the bad that is the stealing10. In her eyes, she has not done wrong. Because of this resource, I came to believe that no one knowingly commits an act of evil. This idea of relative evil paved the way for the idea of the difference between how the victim and the perpetrator perceive the crime. Before, I had some understanding of the magnitude gap that is such an important causal feature in the increasingly severe retribution of the cycle of revenge, but I knew it under a different name, in a different application: relative evil.

Another part of the quote in which my enlightenment was substantially increased is the perceived unpaid debt of the victim. My prior understanding of this concept was painted by a judgment I had about anyone who would seek to “get even.” I believe strongly in an ideal of peace, both in the outside world and inside the self. This belief led me to judge any time I wanted to hold a grudge or get back at someone as a moment of weakness. I generalized this

---

10 It might have been in From Socrates to Sartre [Levine, T. Z. (1984). From Socrates to Sartre: The philosophic quest. New York, New York: Bantam Books], I started reading this and began thumbing through The Republic around the same time.
judgment to the rest of the population as well, and therefore believed that those who engage in
vengeance are in a moment of weakness.

This belief is likely based on a very important part my life growing up. My parents are
very peaceful people. They avoid conflict and generally do their all to make other people happy
and comfortable, even if it is at the risk of their own happiness. For example, this style of
interaction is very common for them. They decide to go out to dinner. My dad picks the
restaurant they go to, and neither of them is especially impressed. However, to make my dad
feel good about his choice, my mom tells him that she really enjoyed the meal. Next week, they
go out to dinner again, and my dad suggests the same place he did last week. Even though he
doesn’t really like the restaurant, he thinks my mom does because she said she enjoyed the
meal. My mom agrees to go, thinking that my dad really liked the restaurant, since he suggested
it again. So both submit themselves to a meal they don’t really like in an attempt to please the
other.

Although this type of social interaction obviously isn’t the most functional, I tend to
approve more of this style rather than the opposite (seeking to make people unhappy) . Said
another way, because I was raised with such social conscientiousness, I tend to look down on
people when they try to cause another person harm or hold a grudge. The problem with such
thinking, however, is that judgment doesn’t lead to an increased understanding. Considering the
cycle of revenge and what makes people engage in it enabled me to empathize with them.
While my previous understanding was characterized by a judgment of those who would harbor
an “unpaid debt,” my current, more enlightened thinking is distinguished by an ability to
empathize with them.

My prior knowledge of retribution included the mechanics of revenge, but I had little
understanding of the “whys” and the “hows” of the people involved. I understood that when a
person is angry about something that someone does, he or she may seek revenge by making
that person suffer. However, I did not really have a concept of what the people involved were
seeking or feeling. This lack of understanding of these features is most likely due to the way I was taught to view anger and vengeance. It is not something that was routinely discussed when I was growing up. I did learn, however, that being vengeful is bad. Perhaps because of this, I didn’t think it would be wise to discuss those feelings with my parents. Generally speaking, however, my family is full of internalizers. We are not so much likely to lash out on someone who has been mean as to blame ourselves for that person’s misdeeds towards us.

My current, more enlightened understanding is characterized by empathy and understanding of the emotional nature of revenge. Before, while I understood the mechanics of revenge, I didn’t understand, or had tried not to understand, the intense emotions that were involved. Thinking about the feelings those involved in revenge are likely to be experiencing explicitly in this way has enabled me to understand why they engage in vengeful behaviors. Due to the fact that it is easy to lose control when one is angry, I also am able to understand how they could commit acts that to me seem so cruel that I don’t think I could commit them if I wanted to. Therefore, my more enlightened thinking is characterized by an ability to understand the emotions of the people engaging in revenge and empathize with them, rather than just a basic understanding of what happens in a revenge situation.

I also became more enlightened about retribution by coming to comprehend that perpetrators are demanding something from their victims when they engage in a retributive act. My understanding became deeper by understanding what the parties involved are searching for each time they switch roles in a revenge situation. My previous thinking held no such ideas about the search for satisfaction in revenge. My current understanding of revenge, however, holds the concept that part of the reason people engage in revenge is to obtain satisfaction from their intended victim’s suffering.

The idea of punishment as another word for retribution enabled me to implicate a sense of perceived inferiority into my more enlightened concept of the cycle of revenge. Before, I had
not considered that such an idea would enter into the equation of revenge. My current ideas include this concept as a potential causal factor in retribution that is cruel and inhumane.

By analyzing Beaumeister’s quote in depth, I am able to better understand situations of revenge. I think this is an important step for me to make because of the pervasiveness of revenge in the world and in my personal life. The next time that the 6-year-old girl I mentioned tries to flip me off (maybe she’ll get the correct finger next time), I will not only identify that she is trying to “get back” at me for enforcing a rule, but perhaps I will have a better understanding of the cycle in which she is trying to engage me and the emotions she is feeling.

SAMPLE DOCUMENTATION – VERY WELL DONE WITH A FEW LIMITATIONS

Quote:

“Grievances can snowball and indeed can be passed down in families for generations, as in the famous feuds and vendettas of history. Because of the magnitude gap, victims will maximize their own suffering and perpetrators will minimize the harm they inflict. And so each time they exchange roles, they will think that there are unpaid debts that call for ever more severe retribution.” (Evil, 160-61)

Statement identifying main insight:

The magnitude gap between how the victim perceives the crime and how the perpetrator sees the crime helps to create the feedback loop of mutual causality between a perceived unpaid debt and increasingly extreme retribution. As victims and perpetrators reverse roles, this magnitude gap exacerbates and perpetuates the cycle of revenge. (word count: 51)

Most important parts:
A: unpaid debts
B: ever more severe retribution

Relationship between the parts:

Unpaid debts necessitate ever more severe retribution

Words:

debts
retribution
Listing of relevant quotes:

Baumeister:

“The social problem with revenge is that retaliations will tend to exceed the original transgressions, often by a great deal.” P. 160

“The logical structure of revenge is, at its center, a simple reversal of victim and perpetrator roles. The victim becomes the perpetrator, striking back for what he or she has suffered.” P. 160

“Offenses seem much greater to the victim than to the perpetrator. This will almost inevitable lead to disproportionate responses, especially if a cycle of retaliation develops.” P. 160

“The victim’s plight is made worse by the magnitude gap between victim and perpetrator view. In revenge, the perpetrator is inflicting harm to reach a certain level of satisfaction, and the victim has to suffer enough (assuming that’s possible) to provide satisfaction. Because victims suffer more than perpetrators gain, the victim of revenge will probably have to suffer far more than the perpetrator realizes.” P. 162

“Even crimes of lesser violence are marked by the magnitude gap. In robbery or burglary, for example, the value of the stolen goods is generally less to the thief than to the victim (unless cash itself is stolen). The victim loses the full value of the jewelry or a stereo, but the thief can only sell those items for a fraction of their worth.” P. 19

“…there is a tendency for these reciprocal and retaliatory acts of aggression to grow more and more severe, and so the initial antagonism may spiral into worse violence.” P. 294

“Perpetrators see what they do as smaller in scope, importance, and severity than victims see it, and so the victim’s notion of a fair retaliation will be more drastic and extreme than what the original perpetrator thinks is fair. Just when one side thinks things are even, the other side thinks it has been the victim of an outrage that cries out for retaliation. This leads to a continuing escalation of the violence.” P. 294

Beck:

“The disciplinarian or the punisher is often oblivious to the long-term impact of the pain inflicted on the “offender.” We feel that once we have gotten our complaint “off our chest,” we have restored harmony to a relationship. The target of our reproach, however, is hurt and builds up a grievance against us. Restoring balance to the relationship for me upsets the balance for you.” P. 46
### DICTIONARY/THESAURUS COMPARISON CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial/prior understanding of idea or word</th>
<th>The what? Additional information and what it helped me understand that I didn’t understand before</th>
<th>So what? The difference this new understanding makes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Debts:</strong> When I think about the word debt, I typically think about it in a different context than the one that is used in the Beaumeister quote. I first think about money, because money seems to be the context in which this word is most commonly used. In fact, it seemed like most definitions for “debt” referred to monetary debt. I also sometimes think about a debt as something one person owes another. For example, if I do someone a favor, they are in my debt. As it applies to Beaumeister, I understand debt to be something negative one person thinks another deserves. Reading Beaumeister has allowed me to understand this type of usage, but before reading him, I would likely not use “debt” in that context, because it is not a familiar usage.</td>
<td><strong>Dictionary one phrase that increased my understanding:</strong> 1. An action, state of mind, or object one has an obligation to perform for another, adopt toward another, or give to another. [Debt. (2009, February 8). In Wiktionary, the free dictionary. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from <a href="http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/debt">http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/debt</a>] This definition’s inclusion of the word obligation emphasized the idea that in the cycle of revenge, the injured party thinks he or she owes something to the other. While the person who lends something in terms or money or favors typically thinks it very important that they be paid back, I think it is interesting that this seems to be the opposite in terms of a debt of violence or aggression. So, for example, if Person A lends money to Person B, it is important to Person A that he get his money back. Person B, however would probably prefer never to pay Person A back. It benefits the lender if the money is paid back, but not the lendee. However, if Person A aggresses Person B, it is important to Person B that the aggression be paid back. In this case, the “lender” (aggressor) does not benefit from a repaid debt, the “lendee” (victim) does. When the debt is a negative thing, it doesn’t benefit the “lender” if the debt is paid.</td>
<td>This outlines the different types of debts in my mind. Debt generally refers to money or favors, and this allows me to think of debts in terms of more negative things, such as violence or aggression. Generally speaking, for monetary debts, the amount due increases over time because of interest. I think that the magnitude gap is a sort of “interest” for negative or violent debts. Because of it, the severity of the violence increases when the original crime is paid back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dictionary two phrase that increased my understanding:</strong> 2. A duty neglected or violated; a fault; a sin; a trespass. “Forgive us our debts.” -- Matt. vi. 12. [debt. (n.d.). Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary. Retrieved March 02, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <a href="http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/debt">http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/debt</a>] I thought it was interesting that, as I was browsing, many sources referred to this usage of the term as being the “archaic” usage. Indeed, Webster’s does include a biblical reference as an example of “debt” being used in this way. I liked that Beaumeister used debt in an archaic way to describe revenge, because revenge is something that goes back throughout the ages and seems to be a timeless</td>
<td>Because of this definition, I can think about debt as being perhaps more passive: neglect as well as abuse. This has implications for how I understand Beaumeister. I assumed that, in order to perpetuate the cycle of revenge, one would need to actively attempt to violate or hurt someone. This, however, makes me think that such an effort is not necessary. It may be possible to perpetuate the cycle by simply ignoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
characteristic of human society. One characteristic of this definition that increased my understanding is describing debt as “a duty neglected or violated”. Before, I understood debt as being a violation, but I had never thought of it as the condition of failing to do something. For example, babies have been shown to express anger when their needs are not being met. They try to “get back” at their caregivers by directing their gaze towards the caregiver while crying. When I think of a child being angry with a parent, I typically think that the child perceives some sort of maltreatment. However, this definition broadened my understanding to include situations of neglect as well.

Synonym that increased my understanding:

“Sin” is a very emotion-laden word, and that emphasizes the emotional nature of the cycle of revenge. It also connotes a sense of shirked duty. To commit a sin, one has to go back on promises they made to themselves and to the community. When a member of a religious community commits a sin, they have violated a sacred rule that is important to the members of that community. To me, a sin is typically not a minimal offense, and therefore, one who commits a sin may be ridden with guilt and punished rather severely by the members of the community. My understanding of the grave nature of sins in a religious setting helps me understand the gravity of a perceived debt in the cycle of revenge.

The idea of the transgressions in the cycle of revenge as sins gives me the capacity to understand how severely the victim views the actions of the aggressor. If a person views a misdeed as very severe, it is much easier to become angry and vindictive. Because of this, I understand why and how victims/perpetrators engage in revenge.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial/prior understanding of idea or word</th>
<th>The what? Additional information and what it helped me understand that I didn’t understand before</th>
<th>So what? The difference this new understanding makes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retribution: I previously understood this word to mean something someone does in response to an attack or injustice. In order for a person to believe they should commit an act of retribution, they must perceive an act against him or herself. It may be perceived only, and is not necessarily based in reality. An act of retribution can occur in many ways in many contexts. It may be between two individuals or between two social or political entities, and may be violent in nature or possibly less overtly aggressive, as in relational aggression between teenage girls.</td>
<td>Dictionary one phrase that increased my understanding: 1. Punishment inflicted in the spirit of moral outrage or personal vengeance. [Retribution. (2009, January 19). In Wiktionary, the free dictionary. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from <a href="http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/retribution">http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/retribution</a>] This definition made me think differently about retribution in that it informed me about the state someone is in when he or she acts in retribution. There were quite a few legal definitions of retribution, which would imply that an act of retribution is something that occurs systematically and unemotionally. While undoubtedly not all acts of retribution occur in the intensely emotional state described by the Wiktionary, in the context of Beaumeister’s quote, I think it makes more sense that there would be a sense of “moral outrage or personal vengeance”. The acts of retribution described by Beaumeister occur when a person believes he or she has been wronged by another. Such a sense of injustice is, in my experience, accompanied by anger. Because of this, the intense emotional state described in this definition helped me understand the condition in which the people in Beaumeister’s quote would be while the switching of roles he describes takes place.</td>
<td>Understanding the state of the individuals participating in the revenge enables me to empathize with them. Such empathy helps me better comprehend why they would perpetuate the cycle of revenge, why they would see the need for retribution, and how they are able to commit acts of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictionary two phrase that increased my understanding: 2. Something given or demanded in repayment, especially punishment. [retribution. (n.d.). The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved March 03, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <a href="http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/retribution">http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/retribution</a>] The concept of retribution being something that is “demanded” from one person or another integrated the idea that one person must suffer so that other must feel satisfied ( Beaumeister, Evil, p. 162) into the idea of the structure of revenge. The person seeking retribution is seeking satisfaction from the original aggressor that can only be obtained through that person’s suffering. Therefore, by seeking retribution, a person is demanding that their victim “give” them satisfaction by suffering. And as the cycle of revenge continues, magnitude gap causes the repayment demanded to be exponentially higher every time the victim and the perpetrator switch roles.</td>
<td>Integrating Baumeister’s idea on p. 162 into the concept of the cycle of revenge enables me to see what the parties involved are trying to find every time they switch roles. When I understand what it is these people are looking for, I am granted further insight into their state of mind and am better able to comprehend why people commit acts of violence to perpetuate the cycle of revenge. As mentioned above, I am able to empathize with them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Punishment:**
To me, *punishment means something negative done in response to another's misbehaving. For one person to punish another means that he or she thinks that he or she is somehow above the party which he or she is punishing. The situation that typically comes to mind is discipline that a mother inflicts on her child. To be thought of as punishment, however, the discipline must be somehow inhumane or less-than-positive.

**Synonym that increased my understanding:**

This helps me understand that an act of retribution is something someone does to someone they identify as inferior. People do not typically punish those that they think are their equals or their superiors. Because of this, when someone is punishing another, he or she diminishes that person’s status in some way. They may think the intended victim is their intellectual inferior, lesser morally, or somehow substandard in a different way. So regardless which of many ways someone can be inferior, the punisher devalues their victim so he or she is perceived as less of a person than the punisher. In addition to being something done in response to a perceived injustice, retribution occurs when the other party is somehow viewed as not as whole or good of a person as the person acting in retribution. Perhaps viewing the person as less than an equal, when paired with such extreme emotion as is described in the Wiktionary definition, there is a risk that the person initiating the punishment begins to view the intended victim as less than human. Because of this, by committing an act of retribution, a person condemns the intended victim to a state of sub-humanity. In a state of sub-humanity, the victim may come to be regarded as not worthy of things we typically grant other people: respect, sympathy, and understanding. Indeed, it may become impossible for the aggressor to empathize with the victim because he or she is viewed as no longer worthy of such emotional effort.

**Intense anger can be unsafe regardless of the context. However, when paired with a view that demeans another person, it could be truly perilous for those involved. Therefore, this synonym and the insight of perceived inferiority that comes with it is important because it helps me understand just how explosive these situations can be, and how they can quickly escalate to fatal circumstances. When we think of situations with chronic and deadly conflict, we typically view both parties as being essentially the same type of people. To us, they are equals (to each other, if not to us). However, to those involved, that is likely not the case. Through an extensive history of retaliation and because of the principle of inferiority implicated in punishment, each side likely views the other as inferior to the other, if not downright sub-human.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial/prior understanding of idea</th>
<th>The what? Additional information and what it helped me understand that I didn’t understand before</th>
<th>So what? The difference this new understanding makes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1). Before reading Beaumeister or Gilligan, I had some idea that what people in general view as evil is not typically regarded as such by those who commit the acts themselves. When I was in middle school, I distinctly remember watching a Lord of the Rings movie with my friends, and afterwards discussing this concept of relative evil with one of them. Becoming aware of Platonic philosophy also had an influence on me. When I was in high school, I developed an interest in philosophy. Somewhere I came across a description of Platonic morality in these terms: no one ever commits something that he or she thinks is wrong. If a woman steals a piece of bread, the good she gets from feeding herself or children outweighs the bad that is the stealing. Therefore, in her eyes, she has not done wrong. These ideas are fairly typical of my understanding of perpetrators who commit acts of violence.</td>
<td>1). “Because of the magnitude gap, victims will maximize their own suffering and perpetrators will minimize the harm they inflict.” After a person engages in an act of retribution, he or she sees the score as even after he or she has had the satisfaction that revenge brings. However, the victim of the act of retribution believes there is a score to settle because the perpetrator engaged in the act of retribution. The reason that this occurs is that the satisfaction the perpetrator gains from his or her aggression is always less in proportion to what the victim must lose as he or she suffers. To me, this is because of the considerable potency negative things have as motivators. One of the instructors I had last semester put this idea into more colloquial terms beautifully: “Bad things suck more than awesome things rule.” This discrepancy is one of the reasons that perpetrators minimize the suffering they cause. They simply don’t realize what they have inflicted. Victims, on the other hand, know exactly how much they had to suffer. When these kinds of situations are tied up with intense emotions (as revenge situations typically are), it becomes nearly impossible for either side to empathize with the other. Even if they were able to do so, the animosity likely runs too high for either side to be willing to attempt this.</td>
<td>1). This is important because it allows me to connect the idea of revenge with other ideas that are important to me, such as the potency of negative events as reinforcers that I discussed in my personality theory class. By connecting these two ideas, I am better able to understand them, because I can understand how they function in a different context. I was also not aware of the magnitude gap between what perpetrators gain and what victims suffer before reading Beaumeister. As the magnitude gap is crucial to the perpetuation of revenge, it allows me to understand how people get caught up in revenge rather than judge those who participate. By understanding such situations, I could potentially help those involved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

11 It might have been in *From Socrates to Sartre* [Levine, T. Z. (1984). *From Socrates to Sartre: The philosophic quest.* New York, New York: Bantam Books]. I started reading this and began thumbing through *The Republic* around the same time.

13 Matthew Siemonko, Personality Theory. We were discussing Thorndike’s Law of Effect and how a behavior that leads to a worse state of affairs decreases a behavior more than a behavior that leads to a better state of affairs increases a behavior.
2). Before reading for this class, I always thought of revenge as happening whenever someone lost control of themselves. I believe in internal peace as an ideal, and disagree with those who cultivate a more violent philosophy. If I find that I desire vengeance, I believe that I am in a moment of weakness. Indeed, I find that revenge is never as sweet as you originally thought, and often leads to dissatisfaction rather than happiness. Simply put, it’s just not worth it. I had never thought of revenge critically before. It has always involved a judgment. However, rather than judging those who commit acts of violence as evil, I typically think of them as unenlightened; I look down on them. The problem with this (besides the pretentiousness), as Gilligan describes in his prologue, is that it does not lead to an increased understanding. It only leads to judgment.

2). “And so each time they exchange roles, they will think that there are unpaid debts that call for ever more severe retribution” This sentence added a lot to my understanding in that it is what made me come to believe that there is a feedback loop of mutual causality between the perceived debt and the retribution. A perceived debt causes the victim to engage in an act of retribution. In turn, the victim’s victim will hold a debt, so the act of retribution causes the debt. As a result, the debt and the retribution cause each other. Because of the magnitude gap, each act of retribution will be more severe than the original transgression, leading to ever more severe violence. In this way, the debt and the retribution form a feedback loop of mutual causality.

I especially like the idea of revenge as a feedback loop, because it helps me understand (rather than judge, as discussed to the left) revenge and how it happens. One problem with this idea, however, is that a feedback loop often implies a certain amount of determinism. Determinism is all well and good when the feedback loop is describing global warming, because that context deals with the behavior of particles such as methane, which follow a set of laws and are predictable in their behavior. People, however, have no such set of laws and are not predictable.

2). Understanding revenge in terms of a feedback loop helps me empathize more with those involved. I think it’s interesting that I’m drawn to describing the behavior of people in these terms, because I typically dislike deterministic theories. I like to be optimistic about people’s capacity for change and tend to favor the humanistic theories. It’s good, however, to have a balance of ideas in one’s repertoire, so I think that by considering revenge in this light, I am diversifying my beliefs.

---