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## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Stanley McChrystal, Felix Dzerzhinsky, Jérôme Kerviel: Are We All Ciphers?

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Abstract: This article examines the fall of United States (US) Army General Stanley McChrystal, and the concepts of the self and identity.

We're well into our second week on the controversial story of the fall of United States (US) Army General Stanley McChrystal. Should he have been relieved of command or not? Is the real story about the blood sport of the mass media, the viability of the US strategy towards Afghanistan and of US national security strategy, military rules of engagement, or the leadership of President Obama? In fact, even the duration of the story may be controversial. Does it begin with circulation of a June 22, 2010 article by Michael Hastings in Rolling Stone? The decision providing access for Mr. Hastings to General McChrystal and his team? Patterns of behavior exhibited by the General as a cadet at West Point or an athlete in high school? Or way back in time to the hubris of characters in just-written classical Greek tragedy, the unsated needs of Gilgamesh, or to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve? Such choices and others about the time necessary and sufficient to understand and explain McChrystal's fall mask even more significant issues. Is there a self at the center of social behavior for General McChrystal and, yes, for all of us? Is the self logos or mythos? Is there anything to understand and explain?

What has led the General to the fall? To point at specific behaviors and their interrelationships assumes combinations of causality, determinism, predictability and statistical likelihood including indeterminate probabilistics which may be the case but also may not. The same combinations may or may not be the case if we place specific behaviors within a welter of social, cultural, and historical phenomena—viz., phenomena constituting one's inner psychological life, phenomena constituting an objective reality independent of inner psychological life, and some interaction of the two.

An alternative is to jettison the mathematics, logics, and systematic observations so successful in understanding and explaining physical, but not psychological, behavior and to develop narratives based on premises of the humanities and critical theory. So based on the pragmatics and aesthetics of the personal and the socio-cultural, one makes choices about whether the General's fall is a tragedy, a romance, a comedy, or satire starring an anarchist, radical, conservative or liberal (cf. Hayden White's *Metahistory*). (An interesting case can be made for General McChrystal, the radical in satire, as Clamence in *The Fall* of Albert Camus. Here, the General seeks to "destroy that flattering [hypocritical] reputation" through making comments intended to be shocking and objectionable but taken as humorous. He might share that "I wanted to put the laughers on my side, or at least to put myself on their side." And with Budweiser Lite Lime in hand (a favorite beverage according to Hastings), "no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures.")

In the context of science or the humanities, do advances in cognitive neuroscience only help us understand and explain why and how we understand and explain via a self?

In the counterintelligence world, we intend to continuously identify and influence putative and ersatz allies, real and imaginary adversaries, and mythical neutrals in an iterative process constrained only by wisdom, creativity, and paranoia via the self. The goal is to break free from a world of smoke and

## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

mirrors towards seeing forever on a clear day with personnel security criteria constituting fragments or varieties of selves. These selves and self-components are overtly and covertly appraised during screenings and interviews, investigations, human resource management strategies, tests, and the like. Yet one of the greatest counterintelligence geniuses of the 20th century might not have been employed today by a counterintelligence bureaucracy.

Felix Dzerzhinsky's name is linked to the Soviet security police—the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Vcheka), the State Political Administration (GPU,) and the State Political Administration (OGPU). Once in these positions, he may have exhibited a single-mindedness of purpose in implementing Soviet terror tactics, employed superlative management and administrative skills, and demonstrated unsurpassed ingenuity in developing counterintelligence techniques (see Gershon, 1973). Yet Dzerzhinsky's early life would have raised red flags to personnel security and counterintelligence experts of any era. (1) He was born of another nation—Poland—and was raised in a spirit of rigid Polish patriotism. (2) He was born to a family with roots in a social class, the petit bourgeoisie, later to be a primary target of Soviet political violence. (3) He was imbued early on with a strict—some would say fanatic—Catholicism, almost entered a seminary, was to serve an officially atheistic regime, and may unconsciously have viewed his acceptance of Marxist-Leninist ideology as a religious conversion. (4) He often displayed rage and a tempestuous anger. (5) Paradoxically, he seemed to have no value system and instead apparently needed to completely identify with a cause or all-encompassing ideology. (6) He could ostensibly have good reason to hate Russia because of noxious consequences for many Poles under Alexander III's Russification program. (7) He may have been very intense and nervous, seemed to psychosomatize conflict, and had significant medical problems including tuberculosis. (8) He had at least one period of academic difficulty, wherein he failed in his studies—Russian of all things. (9) During his adolescence, he may have experienced the sort of exploitation by a charismatic political leader (Moravsky) that could present a huge security vulnerability.

And then there are some of Dzerzhinsky's reputed quotes. "I can neither hate nor love by halves. I simply cannot give only half of my spirit. I either give all or nothing." "I loathe with every fiber all injustice, crime, drunkenness, depravity, excess, extravagance, brothels in which people sell their bodies or souls, or both; I detest oppression, fratricidal strife and national discord...I want to see humanity surrounded with love, to warm it and cleanse it of the filth of modern life." "...And woe to the man who lacks the strength to overcome his feelings." "For me the end...can only be the grave."

And what to make of Jérôme Kerviel, accused of running "...the biggest rogue-trading loss in history..." at the French bank Société Générale. The authors of a recent New York Times write that "...three weeks of court hearings had left [judges and prosecutors] no wiser about what had motivated him...'Who are you really, Mr. Kerviel?' Judge Pauthe asked...'I'm someone who tried to do his job the best he could' [Kerviel replied]...the Paris prosecutor...called [him] 'a manipulator, a trickster, and a liar'...Mr. Kerviel himself betrayed little, if any, emotion. His arms crossed and his gaze often fixed on the floor, he sat impassively...[he was called] an 'evil genius'...[the former chief executive of the investment bank division] said he was dumbfounded by the trader's sang-froid: 'I can't understand how his nerves could have handled the pressure'...'So we know everything there is about you, then?' [The judge asked]...'There is no mystère Kerviel?'...'Not from my point of view,' Mr. Kerviel replied, his voice just above a whisper."

McChrystal, Dzerzhinsky, Kerviel...or any of us. Ciphers as quantities or qualities of no importance because there is no there there? Ciphers as secret methods of writing that are secret only in that there

## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

is no secret behind the secret? Ciphers as persons of no interest because there are no persons, no selves, with whom to be interested or of interest?

Maybe we all crave the fall—through scandal, fate, serendipity or death. Finally we become something—the something that is freedom through nothingness for ever more (cf. Heidegger). And who's buying the next round of Bud Lite Lime?

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