

# Reflections on Duryodhana of the Mahabharata

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Thinking about Duryodhana led me some interesting places from which I returned with more questions than answers. Here are some of them.

**When we look at the world, should we stop with the ideas of good and evil or should we go beyond that?**

The Maha Yuga is a slow (for us) descent into chaos and destruction. If Duryodhana instantiates that destructive imperative, what's the right question to ask about him? It can't be "is he good or bad," since its essential he's bad. Perhaps we should ask how good or bad he is at what his function is. How well is he evil?

Even though what Duryodhana does is absolutely essential for the progress of the universe, there are dangers in appreciating him. It's the kind of thinking that would give Hitler credit for the modern world. After all, the war he started spawned countless technologies and laid the foundation for a united Europe. It was the impetus for the United Nations. If Hitler hadn't destroyed the world, it couldn't have been born anew. But isn't our revulsion for this line of thought appropriate? Amoralism may be the nature of the universe, but does it belong in local situations? If not, why not?

For me, a dark side of enlightenment is acceptance of suffering.

**If Vishnu needs evil, why fight it?** But isn't Vishnu fighting evil? Why else incarnate as Rama or Krishna? Why does he fight evil, when he knows chaos and destruction is what he has chosen? Or does he know? Is Vishnu completely self aware?

**What is dharma?** The Maha Yuga's march toward chaos has happened countless of times before. If there is any pattern to the world, this is it. Although chaos isn't Dharma, its unfolding appears to be. Which is the way of the world, order or chaos? Is there a real difference or does it only depend on your perspective? Think of building a house. From our perspective, a building takes shape, bringing order to the various materials. But for the insects living where the foundation is dug, chaos reigns.

**What is the relationship between desire and destruction?** Early on, Duryodhana makes no secret of his desire to rule the kingdom. When Dhritarashtra asks Yudhishtira what he wants, he passively says it's to do what Dhritarashtra wants. He doesn't have any desire. The Pandavas complacency represents the status quo.

**If all psychological progress comes from the tension of opposites, don't enlightening people need jerks?** What would mythology be like without boneheads like Duryodhana? Stories of great triumph need jerks. Could we have the Mahabharata without Duryodhana?

**Did Duryodhana lose the battle but win the war?** If his function was to move the Yuga along by destroying virtue, he was very successful. He was integral in the destruction of a kingdom and many

great heroes. Those heroes had to die. Bhishma could not live forever. The wish for immortal heroes is the death wish. Does that mean that Duryodhana represents the life principle?

**Why does the universe start off at its best and spend its whole existence in a steady decline?** We are celebrating Vishnu and isn't he in the process of destroying everything? What would it mean for the destruction of everything we value to actually be a cause for celebration? Is this another manifestation of death as an act of love?

**How can what we know about our dreams and what we know about Vishnu's dream inform each other?** We appear in our dreams and Vishnu appears in his. Are his incarnations the results of becoming aware that he is dreaming, just as that happens to some of us? Why is he dreaming what he is dreaming? In a sense, we have the dreams we have so that certain images can appear. Does Vishnu need characters like Duryodhana so he can be Krishna or the others? What does Vishnu's need to be Krishna say about him? Is the movement from pure Dharma to pure chaos a movement for Vishnu from consciousness to the unconscious? Or the other way? Is Vishnu psychologically stagnant or is he involved in a process similar to individuation?

**If Vishnu is dreaming this universe, is it possible I, too, am dreaming a universe?** Perhaps with characters dreaming other universes. Is it possible someone else is dreaming a universe of which Vishnu is as minor a character as I am in his? And someone else is dreaming a universe containing that someone else? Is Vishnu as unaware of the universe he has created as I am about my latent dreams?

**Can you love your Duryodhana?** The greedy, vain, immature and selfish part of you that has brought death and destruction to those people, relationships and ideals you loved and to whom you thought you were devoted. Who do you think you'll most resemble when you die? Krishna? Arjuna? Draupadi? My answer for myself is Duryodhana. Even after a lifetime of soul work, I'm fairly certain I will still be essentially arrogant, selfish, and frightened.

**If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, then is the road to heaven paved with bad intentions?** How would that work? Instead of a three dimensional landscape, think of some sort of multi dimensional symbolic space. Instead of walking on a path, we travel through something more like a tunnel, the lining of which keep us from wandering aimlessly in the undifferentiated void outside. As we move around in that tunnel, our psychologically growing aspect oscillates with the lining, causing a tension of opposites which moves us forward. To be an opposite, the lining could be considered the "bad intentions" associated with psychological stagnation and immaturity.

Here are some observations about the births and parentages of Duryodhana and the Pandavas.

The Pandavas were born of the gods. They are from the spirit world. Duryodhana is of the earth. He had to be planted before he was born. If the plant world could have its way, all man made structures would be overgrown. What do plants care about civilization?

It took the Pandavas one day to be born. It took Duryodhana four years.

How must Duryodhana feel about Vyasa? Vyasa is one of the most venerated people in the world, but Duryodhana knows him as the one who blinded his father to punish his grandmother for not looking at Vyasa when he came to service her. How does that fit into Duryodhana's personal myth?

Duryodhana has two powder puff parents and is the point man for an incredible burst of male energy in the form of 100 brothers. Of course, he's a jerk. It's like riding a lightning bolt. And here, Vyasa blew it again. There were supposed to be 100 children, but when Vyasa cut up that ball, he somehow forgot the female energy, so it was all left over at the end and came, not as part of the brothers, but separately.

There is a line in the Mahabharata where Sanjay tells him “I knew you were a bonehead, but I didn’t know you were a king” I’d like to look at and celebrate him as a bonehead : ) I think the jerk is very undervalued.

I really have doubts about the enlightened view on the sense pleasures as well.

Page 169 a Gandharva says “We have truly heard you are a fool”

P 173 karna says “you are a child and foolish – and I shall die with you.”

When they steal Virata’s cattle, Duryodhana stays in the back of the fray

P243 Satyaki says to Duryodhana “I knew you were sort of a bonehead, but I never dreamed you were a king”

P 247 “It is better to blaze up, even for a moment, than to smolder forever with desire”

Remember when Duhsasana tried to arrest Krishna . His Karma for what he did to Draupadi arrives. Then he insults Krishna, calls him a wimpy cowherd who spends all his time with girls.

Then he goes to kick Krishna’s ass.

Even up in heaven, they know what a jerk Duryodhana is.