

A Research on Alexander of Macedonia, One of the Greatest Conquerors Ever

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Abstract: The motivations for Alexander the Great's military expedition are significant due to the extent of his military conquests. This essay analyses a combination of fundamental motivations for Alexander's conquests, his behavioural patterns, and development during Alexander's youth that might contribute to his motivation. How he was raised and unique events in his life was also considered in an attempt to reach a more reasonable conclusion. A comparison of all these influencing factors is still unable to provide a definite conclusion. However, it has resulted in a speculation that fame was a major influencing factor, in addition to social norms not holding significant impact of Alexander. There is a certain amount of historical evidence that supports his tendency to want more fame. This essay combines the ancient study of history and the relatively modern study of psychology to try and gain a more well rounded understanding of Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

Keywords: Alexander, motivation, fame, behaviour, development

1. Introduction

Alexander the third of Macedonia, mostly widely known as Alexander the Great created one of the largest empires ever. Scholars from around the globe have endeavored themselves into analyzing the factors that contribute to Alexander's military success. In this passage, I will attempt to discuss how Alexander the Great's early life shaped him as an individual and as a military commander. Two different perspectives will be applied to this passage. The first one regards simple logic. The other focuses more on the psychological aspect of Alexander's youth.

2. motivation

2.1. Alexander's fundamental motivations

One aspect that has to be considered is the basic sources of motivation for Alexander's conquests. The most fundamental reasons that drove him towards constant territorial extension was the longing for wealth. Wealth is "abundance of valuable material possessions or resources" [1]. If we take a simple approach towards analyzing a possible factor of his motivation, one could say that Alexander was expanding to seek more natural resources. However, this drive to obtain wealth can be reasonably used to describe most individuals throughout history. Therefore, the issue of wealth isn't necessarily different for Alexander than any other individual. This would mean that it is not logical to attribute

the majority of his motivation towards wealth. Fame can often be a large source of motivation for people with larger ambitions. The concept of fame is an intrinsically abstract notion. Fame is “the state of being known or recognized by many people because of your achievements, skills, etc.” [2]. an illustration of fame can be how many people now are still aware of Alexanders military success without actually coming into contact with him, since he lived thousands of years ago. Fame most likely contributes more towards Alexanders enthusiasm regarding conquering. If one were to think about Alexanders childhood, his education that he received from Aristotle will most likely come to mind. In the earlier stages of his life, Alexander was given a copy of the Iliad by Aristotle. Alexander was inspired by the contents of the Iliad. According to the Plutarch Alexander kept a copy of the Iliad annotated by Aristotle “with his dagger under his pillow, declaring that he esteemed it a perfect portable treasure of all military virtue and knowledge.” [3] He gained a certain philosophy from the character Achilles. This made Alexander believe that living a short life of fame and glory is better than living a long boring life. This was the mindset that stuck with Alexander when he fully committed himself into his conquests.

2.2. Comparison of motivations

It has clearly been demonstrated above that fame and glory is more significant than wealth for Alexander. Both these sources of motivation above would be considered as forms of extrinsic motivation. However, multiple psychological studies have demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is usually more consistent than extrinsic motivation. Abraham Maslow described extrinsic motivation as “may lead to burnout or lose its effectiveness over time” [4] Alexander’s conquests demanded a strong and stable source of motivation. Therefore, it is also important to consider the possible forms of intrinsic motivation that Alexander possessed. One possibility for Alexander to be so insistent on waging war might be his father. Philip of Macedonia built an army but was not able to successfully conquer Persia before he was murdered. There is a possibility that Alexander felt inclined towards conquering because he felt that it was his responsibility on a personal level to avenge his father. However, this would be extremely dependent upon Alexander’s relationship with his father. It is impossible to accurately depict the relationship between Alexander and his father. It is true that there were accounts of event where Alexander and his Philip interacted, but these descriptions are incapable of fully illustrating how much affection or respect that was present. In addition, there have been multiple cases where there were large scale direct conflicts between Philip and Alexander. This does not prove that Philip was not an influencing factor on Alexanders source of motivation, this can only demonstrate it is unlikely that Philip is a major factor for Alexanders sources of intrinsic motivation. Another possible reason for Alexander’s conquests might simply be that he enjoyed conquering and waging wars. This is an unlikely situation that someone would enjoy the actual process of war. From a purely scientific and psychological perspective it is possible that Alexander enjoyed war and did not require another reason for him to start and maintain his conquests.

2.3. Psychopathic behaviour

Although it has to be taken into consideration that Alexander was chasing Darius of Persia across two countries. This behavior makes it seem like Alexander hated Darius and wanted him dead, however, there is no apparent reason that Alexander hating Darius except that their countries were at war and that they led armies to fight against each other. Alexander did not repeat his unusual behavior with anyone else that did not anger him on a personal level. Except from this abnormality, fame would be the most significant reason for Alexanders choices. I have mentioned above that intrinsic motivation is often more powerful and consistent, however in Alexander’s case fame would hold more influence. The reason behind this would once again be based in what he experienced as a child. His father was

the King of Macedonia when he was young, this meant that it is extremely difficult for Alexander and Philip to develop “what would be considered in modern standards” a “healthy” relationship. It is probably true that Alexander have put in effort into avenging his father by dealing with the people who murdered Philip. But that is not enough evidence that he cared about his father enough to conquer nearly all of the known world back then. Even if he was avenging his father, his conquest would have stopped after Persia. Alexander continued his expedition long after he conquered the Persian empire. He refused to stop his campaigns even when his soldiers and generals were directly opposing his decisions. The chances of Alexander conquering so much land simply because he enjoyed fighting also seems unreasonable. Waging so much war just for the joy of killing would be considered psychopathic behavior. A psychopath is defined as “someone who does not follow the moral norms of their society and lacks empathy and remorse.” [5] Whereas the historical accounts of Alexander never described him with any other symptoms of being a psychopath. It is true that it could be considered as sadistic and unnecessarily cruel, but the longing of fame and recognition can suffice as a reason for why he killed so many people. In addition, most of the time Alexander did not kill civilians after the battles were won. Wanting fame would give a logical explanation for the lack of other defining characteristics of being a psychopath. The reasoning above demonstrates why the most prominent source of motivation for Alexander was most probably the longing of fame. This brings forth a new question of why Alexander craves such a large amount of fame and recognition.

3. Fame

3.1. Further analysis of fame

Conquering the Persian empire at such a young age would already provide Alexander the Great with an abundant amount of fame. This makes certain inquiries about Alexander more significant. The reasons behind Alexander’s “obsession” with living a life of glory and fame becomes more important. According to a study done by Dara Greenwood, the main reason people seek fame are the desire to be seen and to be valued, the desire for a “famous lifestyle”, and the desire to make other individuals proud. It is obvious that Alexander prefers to be seen and valued. One example to demonstrate Alexander’s appreciation for being seen and valued is how he named a large number of places that he conquers Alexander. By naming these cities after himself, not only will he achieve fame in his era, but he will also be able to prolong the duration of which the fame lasts. It is unlikely that a luxurious lifestyle was what drove Alexander the Great to lead such a large number of conquests. This is because Alexander the Great already had a luxurious lifestyle even before he conquered Persia. He was born into the Royal family of Macedonia meaning that he had an extensive number of resources to his disposal. Anything that Alexander could have wanted would be provided to him. Despite conquering large areas of lands. His lifestyle does not actually benefit from any gain that his conquests bring. Ironically, waging all these wars meant that he was risking his available resources to try and do something that does not guarantee a profit. The alternative possibility is Alexander the Great wanting fame because he intends to make someone proud. This explanation is logically valid, but the historical accounts of Alexander does not provide sufficient evidence on Alexander being extremely close to an individual to the extent of which he was willing to conquer most of the known world back then to make them proud.

3.2. Development

According to Sigmund Freud, human personality is complex and has more than a single component. In his famous psychoanalytic theory, Freud states that personality is composed of three elements known as the id, the ego, and the superego. These elements work together to create complex human behaviors. The Id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. This aspect of

personality is entirely unconscious and includes instinctive and primitive behaviors. According to Freud, the ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. In the case of Alexander, the Great, he most likely did not factor whether the real world accepted his influence, he simply decided to conquer a large amount of land. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five. The superego holds the internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from our parents and society. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. The possibility of the “underdevelopment” of a superego can also factor into Alexander's decision making. If the ego is able to adequately moderate between the demands of reality, the id, and the superego, a healthy and well-adjusted personality emerges. Freud believed that an imbalance between these elements would lead to a maladaptive personality. For example, an individual with an overly dominant id might become impulsive, uncontrollable, or even criminal. This description seems to fit what the historical records of Alexander the Great. This could mean that from a specific standpoint, Alexander of Macedonia could have been a case of someone with maladaptive personality. The above does not prove that Alexander has to have had some kind of psychological abnormality, it only demonstrates that the possibility exists.

4. Conclusion

It is evident that Alexander the Great is extremely successful militarily, and the implication that comes with his military success is that he would be intellectually advanced. Military planning and strategizing are extremely complicated which requires the individual in charge to have a complete understanding of the situation and the ability to make quick accurate analysis. This all suggests that Alexander the Great would be intelligent. However, he is unable to develop certain social standards or moral understandings. Many historical accounts of Alexander have displayed him struggling to control his own emotions and displaying outbursts of anger in situations where this kind of behavior was considered inappropriate. Certain things that Alexander said would also suggest that he did not process what he was going to say beforehand. Before Alexander the Great's death, he did not specify a successor (which is understandable because there were many factors influencing whether we would be able to announce his preferred successor), this was one of the most significant reasons that led to the demise of his empire. Taking such a risk is not what an intelligent and careful leader would do. This combined with Alexander's aggressive tendencies makes him a controversial historical figure. The element of controversy is not only subject to the things he did, but also the person that he was.

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