

Part 1: Fatalism has been defined as “the degree to which an individual recognizes a lack of ability to control his future” so that a fatalistic outlook on life “results in a failure to see a relationship between work and one’s economic condition. Having enough is thought to be almost entirely due to luck and is never believed to be brought about or furthered by personal initiative.”

Fatalism can promote qualities such as “passivity, pessimism, acceptance, endurance, flexibility, and evasion. Fatalism results from a perception that something beyond our control causes our immediate circumstances. That cause may be random luck or manipulation of spiritual forces directed by someone else. The important point is that high fatalism suggests a low degree of control over one's actions and one's environment.”

While some cultures like the USA believe that they have the absolute control of their lives in their hands and that their future depends on their own efforts and actions, fatalistic cultures believe that the future is in the hands of forces outside their control like God, fate, or luck. In the USA, it is a common belief that the amount of hard work and effort a person makes determines his or her success. No matter how poor the background of the person is, personal effort can lead even a poor boy from Kentucky to become president like in the case of Abraham Lincoln. If people want to have money, they will have to work extra hard perhaps in two jobs and make wise investments. Time is money. If you can make ten dollars a day with your work, but you decide to have fun or do nothing during half of the day, even if you only spend one dollar for your enjoyment, you have really wasted six, the dollar spent and the five dollars you did not earn. Later in life you may regret the loss of that money but that will be your own fault and nobody else's.

Discuss:

- To what degree do you think that fatalism is present in Costa Rican cultural perspectives?
- In what ways do you think Costa Rican perspectives about success, effort, and money are similar or different to the US perspectives described in the second paragraph?

Part 2: In Costa Rican psyche, success can be attributed to being intelligent or rather street-smart, “*ser vivo*”, or “*jugado*” or to God's will rather than hard work. According to Swiss psychologist Pierre Thomas Claudet, most Costa Ricans see work as an unavoidable evil, a social obligation or burden imposed by others with exploitative interests, and not like a service for, or commitment with, the community, and least of all as a way for self-improvement. Therefore, Costa Ricans adopt a passive-aggressive attitude towards work, spending their energy on how to avoid their duties at work, “*llévela suave*” (take it easy). This negative attitude towards work is seen in the lack of interest, discipline, and responsibility to meet our duties.

Another Tico cultural trait that can be associated with fatalism is the concept of “*pobrecito salado*” (poor little unlucky thing). “*¡Pobrecito mi chiquito!*” or simply “*pobrecito*” is a common Costa Rican expression. Claudet affirms that many Costa Ricans have this trait of consciously or unconsciously making others feel pity or sympathy for them because they have to face a natural and universal situation like working, studying, waking up early, walking, cooking, or studying for an exam.

A keyword to understand this cultural trait is the word victim. “*Pobrecitos*” see others and themselves as victims of their situations, duties or obligations, and this condition of victim is used as a justification not to take ownership or be accountable for their choices or actions. Claudet believes that this culture of the *pobrecito* starts at home with paternalistic parents that pamper (*chinear*) their children and prevent them from ever growing as fully autonomous, self-sufficient individuals. These kinds of parents try to please the desires of their children and they become allies with them against a “hostile” society, school or environment. Being a child or an adolescent is equivalent to being somewhat handicapped and therefore in need of the parents’ overprotection.

Discuss:

- To what degree do you think Claudet’s descriptions of Costa Rican cultural perspectives are accurate?
- How are these perspectives similar or different to your own individual perspectives and those of your close family members?