

ALETHEIA

Alpha Chi's Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship

Volume 11 | 2026

The Contradicting Personality of Hayao Miyazaki

Nicholas Breen

Averett University
Virginia Beta

Aletheia Vol. 11, 2026

Title: The Contradicting Personality of Hayao Miyazaki

DOI: 10.21081/ax0447

ISSN: 2381-800X

Keywords: Hayao Miyazaki, Alfred Adler, Albert Bandura, personality theory, reciprocal determinism, striving

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Author contact information is available upon request from aletheia@alphachihonor.org.

Aletheia—The Alpha Chi Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship

- This publication is an online, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary undergraduate journal, whose mission is to promote high quality research and scholarship among undergraduates by showcasing exemplary work.
- Submissions can be in any basic or applied field of study, including the physical and life sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, education, engineering, and the arts.
- Publication in *Aletheia* will recognize students who excel academically and foster mentor/mentee relationships between faculty and students.
- In keeping with the strong tradition of student involvement in all levels of Alpha Chi, the journal will also provide a forum for students to become actively involved in the writing, peer review, and publication process.
- More information can be found at www.alphachihonor.org/aletheia. Questions to the editors may be directed to aletheia@alphachihonor.org.

Alpha Chi National College Honor Society invites to membership juniors, seniors, and graduate students from all disciplines in the top ten percent of their classes at hundreds of college campuses nationwide. Since the Society's founding in 1922, Alpha Chi members have dedicated themselves to "making scholarship effective for good." Alpha Chi is a member in good standing of the Association of College Honor Societies, the only national certifying body for collegiate honor societies. To learn about chartering a chapter of Alpha Chi on your campus, visit AlphaChiHonor.org/charter.



Title: The Contradicting Personality of Hayao Miyazaki

DOI: 10.21081/ax0447

ISSN: 2381-800X

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

The Contradicting Personality of Hayao Miyazaki

Nicholas Breen

Averett University
Virginia Beta

Abstract

This paper analyzes the personality development of animator, director, and filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki. A background on Miyazaki's life is first overviewed, and then his personality is analyzed using theoretical approaches from Alfred Adler and Albert Bandura. This analysis highlights how reciprocal determinism provides insight into the interacting influences of his behaviors, personality, and environment. Bandura's concepts of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and environmental influence help explain Miyazaki's perfectionism, interest in aeronautics, and the opposition between his pessimistic world view and hopeful themes in his films. Adlerian concepts of inferiority, striving, fictional finalism, and the creative self are used to highlight Miyazaki's motivations, including his goal for meaningful work and his responses to early guilt, responsibility, and parental relationships. Together, these frameworks highlight interacting effects of Miyazaki's environment, internal beliefs, and behaviors, creating an, at times, contradictory personality, reflected through his films with a deep interest in life and its depiction.

Keywords: Hayao Miyazaki, Alfred Adler, Albert Bandura, personality theory, reciprocal determinism, striving

Hayao Miyazaki is a world-renowned animator, director, and filmmaker from Japan. His films and the studio he started are known for their universal themes, magical stories, imitation of life, and beautiful animation. Miyazaki's films are often seen as a reflection of himself, and indeed they do contain strong themes related to his personality and life events. Yet, this optimism and hope in his films is not often seen in Miyazaki himself, as he even refers to himself as a pessimist. To understand this better, this paper will use approaches and theories from Albert Bandura and Alfred Adler to analyze Miyazaki's experiences and personality. Undoubtedly, through his characteristics of pacifism, hard work, perfectionism, and many more, we can clearly see how Miyazaki's environment, experiences, and his own values significantly impacted his development and outlook on life.

Hayao Miyazaki was born on January 4, 1941 in a village in Tokyo called Akebono-cho (Aamodt, 2022; McClelland, 2020). The famous animation director was the second oldest of his three brothers, and having been born in the midst of World War II, was deeply shaped by his early experiences—something that is evident in his films today (McClelland, 2020). Though the war made for challenging times in Japan, Miyazaki's family lived in comparable comfort during the early stages because his father, Katsuji Miyazaki, was the director of a company that manufactured parts for Japanese fighter planes (Collin, 2014; Shadow, 2015). Wealth did not fully exempt them from the war, and in 1944, they were forced to leave their hometown, now in ruins due to U.S. bombing raids (Aamodt, 2022). Miyazaki and his older brother then lived in a home in the countryside of Utsunomiya, where it is likely that Miyazaki's appreciation for nature started. Unfortunately, in 1945, Miyazaki witnessed the bombing of Utsunomiya and was forced to flee once again with the images of “nature in flames engraved into his mind” (Aamodt, 2022; Shadow, 2015).

Further, Miyazaki has strong memories of guilt during the war, given his family's avoidance of major conflicts from the war. One particular moment is when Miyazaki's family was leaving Utsunomiya, where Miyazaki saw his family and others in “positions of power and affluence” abandoning others who were fleeing Utsunomiya (Aamodt, 2022). Though he is not entirely sure if it is a memory or a story he heard later, Miyazaki says he thought he heard a woman saying, “Please let us on,” and he thought he saw her and her daughter fading in the distance as they ran towards

their truck. He said this “gradually took root in his head like a traumatic event” (The Japan Foundation, 2021). This guilt was furthered in Miyazaki's later experience beginning school where several of his classmates had lost their fathers in the war. Though Miyazaki had great admiration for his father, the relationship became strained when he learned of the financial profit his father earned during the war. Still, Miyazaki's experience with airplanes growing up led to a deep fascination that would permeate his artwork and films from childhood to adulthood (Aamodt, 2022).

Another impactful event for Miyazaki was the tuberculosis infection of his mother in 1947. McCarthy describes his mother as “a woman of very strong character and intellectual interests” who had a profound impact on Miyazaki (Guitron, 2013). Though his mother eventually recovered, the eight years of illness meant the family had to move around frequently for treatment. Miyazaki's mother became more distant, and he had to mature quickly to take on greater responsibilities (Aamodt, 2022).

Through Miyazaki's teenage years, he was greatly inspired by Osamu Tezuka and focused much of his work on becoming a manga artist, though this path was not entirely constant (Shadow, 2015). In 1963, he graduated from Gakushuin University with a degree in Political Science and Economics. That same year, he became an animator at the Toei animation company, where he later became the chief secretary for the labor union. Here, he frequently voiced his opinion and continued to work himself up by taking on more projects and responsibility. At Toei, he met Isao Takahata, with whom he would build a lifelong partnership (Shadow, 2015). He also met an animator named Akemi Ota, whom he married in 1965 and had two sons with (Talbot, 2005). In 1971, Miyazaki and Takahata left Toei to work on *Lupin III* (Shadow, 2015). Miyazaki continued to work on various projects in different capacities, including a collaboration with Takahata on *Panda! Go Panda!* (Hayao Miyazaki, n.d.), but it wasn't until 1979 when he was finally given the opportunity to direct *The Castle of Cagliostro*. Though this was a big step for Miyazaki, he expressed his dissatisfaction with his lack of freedom during the project and wished to produce work that was more unique in the future. Finally, he created a project of his own and released the 1984 film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (Shadow, 2015). This was a major stepping stone that allowed Miyazaki and Takahata, as

well as Toshio Suzuki to form Studio Ghibli in 1985 and become its directors (Talbot, 2005). McClelland (2020) expresses how this allowed Miyazaki to “spread his wings” and display his interests in film such as steampunk, aeronautics, and lost childhood. Throughout this time, Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli continued to gain more success each year, with its 2001 film *Spirited Away* breaking every box office record in Japan and winning an Oscar for best animated film (Hayao Miyazaki, n.d.), though he did not attend the ceremony because he loathed that the U.S. had invaded Iraq four days before (Schipperges, 2018). Miyazaki is known for being a workaholic (Talbot, 2005)—a term broadly defined as someone with a “stable tendency to compulsively and excessively work” (Andreassen, 2014). He had already retired multiple times since 1998 (Shadow, 2015). Yet at the age of 82, he released his 11th film at Studio Ghibli, one inspired by events from his life, titled *The Boy and The Heron* in the U.S. or *How Do You Live* in Japan (Kelly, 2023). Throughout his life, Miyazaki has continued to be shaped by his experiences and often expresses these aspects in his animation and directing. It may seem like he is reaching the end of his career, but based on the past, who is to say how much more Miyazaki will do?

When looking at Hayao Miyazaki, it is clear that many of his life experiences and the environment he grew up in had major impacts on his works and behaviors, but these effects can be better understood when considering Bandura’s concept of reciprocal determinism and how Miyazaki’s behaviors, personality, and environment all had interacting influences on each other (Cloninger, 2018). A simple example is how Miyazaki’s fascination with aeroplanes and machinery can be attributed to the environment he grew up with around his father, leading to these topics filling his artwork and movies. Similar early experiences contributed to key aspects of his personality such as events mentioned earlier during World War II and Miyazaki’s development for his distaste of war, injustice, and hatred (Shadow, 2015).

However, it is also due to his personality and drive that he became such a successful director and animator to express these characteristics. When Miyazaki was a teenager and inspired by Osamu Tezuka, he put all of his effort and energy into becoming a manga artist, exhibiting his aspects of self-efficacy and regulation. Miyazaki’s son, Goro, said that his father had a sort of “complex toward his brothers” and gave him strong motivation towards animation, even though he wasn’t

dexterous. However, he was dissatisfied with his manga artwork, calling them “a poor copy of Tezuka,” and ended up destroying them (Shadow, 2015)—a hint into the perfectionist attitude that would follow Miyazaki throughout his career. Luckily, after seeing the animated feature *Hakujaden*, he rekindled his interest in manga and was determined to use his own unique style and storytelling (Shadow, 2015). It is likely that his determination and high expectations for himself is what led to him becoming such a talented animator and storyteller. He knew that his ideas and animations may not be accepted, and even though many were rejected, he continued to work in animation to sustain himself until he eventually started encountering more success (Arakawa, 2019b).

After learning of the death of his mother, he exerted more effort into the making of the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and continued to include characters inspired by his mother in future works (Arakawa, 2019b). It was his personality and determination that influenced his behaviors and work on his films. This perfectionistic attitude was evident when making the film *Ponyo*, with Miyazaki stating, “If this film is no good, everything will be a waste. What I don’t want to do is embarrass myself. I want to make a film that won’t shame me” (Arakawa, 2019b). Miyazaki would even work when he felt sick (Arakawa, 2019d). These aspects of perfectionism, his workaholic nature, and playing a role in every aspect of intensive projects led to him being quite stern and irritable during production. The process would often push his team significantly, with many leaving after the end (JCU Languages, 2019). It is clear that Miyazaki’s hardworking attitude permeated his personality and actions in his goals, while also being a strong factor for his success.

These aspects of personality, environment, and behavior can be interrelated. Miyazaki developed a desire to create something new from his exposure to animation in his youth, and it was his uniquely shaped personality that led to his specific behavior. This may have eventually played a part in his start of Studio Ghibli, where he sought more creative freedom to express his work (Shadow, 2015). It was also Miyazaki’s self-regulation of his behavior that gave him inspiration for his work. He says that “ideas come from the unexpected,” and he places himself in environments to evoke this, whether it be traveling through town, staying at a friend’s house by the water, or spending time in solitude (Arakawa, 2019a). He even took the initiative to visit the Tate Britain Artist Museum, where after seeing the

detailed art, realized that his and the team's style needed to change and improve, and given his personality, he did just that (Arakawa, 2019a). This theory can provide valuable insight into the influence of multiple factors on Miyazaki's life and how they interact to shape his life and personality. His determination and high expectations have been a strong factor guiding his life, success, and behavior.

Adler's approach is useful in analyzing Miyazaki's case because of the focus on inferiority and the influence of family and early memories. Miyazaki specifically faced situations of feeling inferior. Growing up, he had digestive problems and was not believed to live past 20 according to a doctor. Miyazaki was considered physically weak and one of the slower runners growing up, likely contributing to his sense of inferiority early on (Arakawa, 2019b). As previously mentioned, he often expressed a perfectionistic quality and wanted to make creations that he would not be ashamed of, similar to Adler's concept of perfection striving (Cloninger, 2018; Shadow, 2015). Though he was a sensation when becoming an animator, he still faced rejection throughout his career. After getting his first job as an animator, for the first time in his life he did not feel inferior (Arakawa, 2019b).

Through this same lens, Miyazaki has a fictional finalism of creating work that makes people happy. He has often grappled with his reason for living. Even as a child, he felt and wished he hadn't been born after his mother became ill. However, he found solace in animation, providing him with a satisfactory purpose (Arakawa, 2019b). According to Adler, this could potentially be Miyazaki's defense mechanism or goal (Cloninger, 2018). Miyazaki has always had a particular wish: "I want people to have fun. That's my motivation. It's because... if I can entertain people maybe I deserve to exist. I have this repressed need to feel useful. That was probably formed in my childhood. I don't want to dig that up. I just like people to have fun" (Arakawa, 2019b). It seems his striving towards this has led him to great heights and certain personality characteristics. However, this dedication also meant Miyazaki was often away from home working, meaning he had little time, if any at all, to spend with his son Goro. Hayao even says that he "owes that little boy an apology." Even today their relationship can be somewhat stern. Goro has directed more than one film for Studio Ghibli, but Hayao's at times blunt personality shows when he expresses criticisms

to Goro's work and often says his son should not be a director. Still, Hayao, driven by his goal, has said that he made animations to make his son happy; and indeed, his son did enjoy his films, in a way filling the absence that he felt (Arakawa, 2019c).

Miyazaki's early memories and family also had a likely impact on his personality development. Growing up around his father and during World War II certainly shaped his personality and beliefs, and given Miyazaki said "like it or not, a film is a reflection of its director," his movies provide a clear understanding of just this (Arakawa, 2019a). Whether the themes related to his college degree such as economics or politics or related to his experiences and values like nature and peace, Miyazaki's films provide a window into his psyche (Schnelbach, 2018).

Though Adler's theory mentions the importance of parental influence during childhood, it does not appear that any severe impairment impacted Miyazaki's emotional development from the illness that his mother suffered. This does not mean that it wasn't impactful in many other ways. Being the second oldest child, Miyazaki had to take on extra responsibilities while his mother was sick and his father was at work, having "stated that he is saddened that his childhood was taken away from him at a young age" (Aamodt, 2022). Nonetheless, Miyazaki had parents that likely had a positive impact in shaping his life by encouraging his creativity and activities such as reading, drawing, and aeronautics (McClelland, 2020); although, coming from a family of relative success, his parents had a "very non-cordial reception" of his interest in manga as a career (The Japan Foundation, 2021).

Even though Miyazaki has said that he couldn't "trace his parents' influences on him," it is very likely that they impacted his outlook on life, as he has himself stated. He has specifically described his mother as one of the "biggest impacts" on his life, influencing his work ethic and character, as well as his films' characters, and the "viewpoints on feminism and gender roles" (Guitron, 2013). Goro mentioned his father being the closest of his brothers to his mother and the immense influence she had on him—she was someone he could talk to about all his questions and "big ideas" (Talbot, 2005). Napier mentions Miyazaki's inspiration from her and describes her as strong, bright, and forthright (Japan Society of Boston, 2022). We can see this forthrightness exhibited by Miyazaki throughout his career not only with his

direct opinions with his team during film production but also in possession of the freedoms for his films. There was even a rumour that said that Miyazaki sent Harvey Weinstein a samurai sword in the post with a message saying “No cuts” when it was said he was handling the U.S. release of *Princess Mononoke*—though Miyazaki says it was his producer that did it (Brooks, 2005). While his brothers may have been more influenced by their father and went into business, it appears Miyazaki was more influenced by his mother. Still, he has said that he inherited his father’s “anarchist feelings and his lack of concern for embracing contradictions” (Quality Culture, 2022).

Adler’s term “creative self” provides a valuable insight into Miyazaki’s early memories and his films. This concept explains actions by a person as a means to create fulfillment or to compensate for feelings of inferiority. It may be possible to apply this to Miyazaki’s literal creativity and his films (Cloninger, 2018). His common themes of childhood may serve as a fulfillment for the one he feels he did not get to adequately experience (McClelland, 2020); the roles in his movies inspired by his mother may compensate for her illness, with Miyazaki even expressing that he wonders if his mother’s life could have been more full (Arakawa, 2019b). His strong themes relating to war, peace, and injustice are likely related to his early experiences during the war and used as ways to express the guilt he still feels from himself, his family, and his country (Quality Culture, 2022).

Miyazaki seems to have conflicting ideals, with his personal words saying one thing and his films saying another. The self-proclaimed pessimist says his negative aspects of brutality, resentment, and hatred are much stronger in him than others and that he often suppresses them, but this is not his real character. He says, “There seems to be another ‘Hayao Miyazaki’ unfamiliar to me” (Quality Culture, 2022). Still, he tries to keep these feelings of hopelessness at bay in his films and doesn’t believe that “adults should impose their vision of the world on children” (Mes, 2002). In an interview with *The Guardian*, he mentions his pessimism takes a pause when a child comes into the world. Even though Miyazaki says he knows “the world is heading in a bad direction,” he can’t express this to children. Though in the interview he says film doesn’t have the power to be a force of good and that it only taps into “aggressive, violent urges,” he later says that if artists “say that life is worth living and the world is worth living—then some-

thing good might come of it” (Brooks, 2005). Through his creative self, his films are an outlet for this quality deep within him; perhaps he does have some hope for the world. With so many of his film’s heroines being children, he appears to place this hope and empowerment to the rising youth (The Japan Foundation, 2021).

These elements in his films, especially those relating to his mother, may hint at a bigger concept of exploring living and his philosophical personality, especially evident with his last film (so far) titled in Japan, *How Do You Live*. Not only seeing his mother severely ill but also his own experience with illness, war, and destruction may have sparked early questions about life, living, and striving. Indeed, Miyazaki seems to be often fixated on this idea in his films, and it may be likely that this had an immense effect on him. In the medium of animation where it is easy and often purposefully designed to defy elements of the real world, Miyazaki is extremely focused on accurately depicting the core aspects of life and movement. Seeing the struggles that can come with life, he wanted to make sure he lived a life worth living, that accomplished his goals, and that, even through his pessimistic lens, aligned with a future world he hoped for. Though he may lament about his negative outlook on life and give an impression that he will be leaving this doomed planet “not a minute too soon” (Brooks, 2005), it seems each of his movies convinces himself and others to keep living.

Miyazaki illustrates just how important development can be in one’s personality. It is clear how his environment and experiences shaped him, but who is to say that everyone would have had the same response that he did. There are many intersecting, if not conflicting, details within his personality. His experience of destruction clearly impacted his disdain for war, yet he is still greatly fascinated with war planes and these concepts in his films. He can have an almost extreme pessimism for the world and its future, yet he says “even amidst the hatred and carnage, life is still worth living” (Bose, 2021). It seems that his life, influences, and impacts have actually led to one of the most optimistic viewpoints—one that may not always be on the surface of his personality but that is certainly evident in his works and psyche, an idea that may guide his life and being forward. From his perfectionism and directness to his pacifism and hopeful pessimism, Miyazaki’s personality is one that has been shaped throughout his life and continues to shape his life, outlook, and of course, his films.

References

- Aamodt, O. M. (2022). *Finding Miyazaki* (Bachelor's thesis, NTNU).
- Andreassen C. S. (2014). Workaholism: An overview and current status of the research. *Journal of behavioral addictions*, 3(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1556/JBA.2.2013.017>
- Arakawa, K. (2019a, February 23). *EP. 1 Ponyo is Here - 10 years with Hayao Miyazaki* (Film). NHK World Japan
- Arakawa, K. (2019b, March 29). *EP. 2 Drawing What's Real - 10 years with Hayao Miyazaki* (Film). NHK World Japan
- Arakawa, K. (2019c, April 20). *EP. Go Ahead – Threaten Me - 10 years with Hayao Miyazaki* (Film). NHK World Japan
- Arakawa, K. (2019d, May 25). *EP. No Cheap Excuses - 10 years with Hayao Miyazaki* (Film). NHK World Japan
- Bose, S. D. (2021, January 5). Hayao Miyazaki: The life and lasting influence of the Studio Ghibli auteur-animator. *Far Out Magazine*. <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/hayao-miyazaki-studio-ghibli-life-career-films/>
- Brooks, X. (2005, September 14). A god among animators. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/sep/14/japan.awardsandprizes>
- Cloninger, S. C. (2018). *Theories of personality: Understanding persons*. Pearson.
- Collin, R. (2014, May 9). *Hayao Miyazaki interview: "I think the peaceful time that we are living in is coming to an end."* *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/10816014/Hayao-Miyazaki-interview-I-think-the-peaceful-time-that-we-are-living-in-is-coming-to-an-end.html>
- Guitron, S. (2013). *Miyazaki*. *Angles* 2013. https://cmsw.mit.edu/angles/2013/?page_id=94
- Hayao Miyazaki*. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. (n.d.). <https://www.oscars.org/governors-awards/2014/hayao-miyazaki>
- Japan Society of Boston (2022, January 19) Susan Napier's Miyazakiworld [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwQm_19xcKo
- JCU Languages (2019, September 24) Mitzui Lecture 2019 Susan Napier on Miyazaki [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FICRQKpNeHk>
- Kelly, S. (2023, December 9). *The Boy and the Heron: Inside the dark heart of Studio Ghibli's latest animated masterpiece*. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20231208-the-boy-and-the-heron-inside-the-dark-heart-of-studio-ghibils-latest-animated-masterpiece>
- McClelland, M. (2020). The Legendary Creativity of Hayao Miyazaki and Shigeru Miyamoto as a Product of Metacognitive Awareness, Family, and Environment. *Journal of Genius and Eminence*, 4(1), 15-21.
- Mes, T. (2002, January 7). Hayao Miyazaki. *Midnight Eye*. <http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/hayao-miyazaki/>
- Quality Culture (2022, August 6) The Conflicting Ideals of Hayao Miyazaki [Video], Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UG6XzB_J3IA
- Schipperges Tjus, E. (2018). A Voice Against War: Pacifism in the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao.
- Schnelbach, L. (2018, October 24). A grand unified theory of Hayao Miyazaki: MiyazakiWorld: A life in art by Susan Napier. *Reactor*. <https://reactormag.com/miyazakiworld-a-life-in-art-by-susan-napier-tbr-stack-book-review/>
- Shadow, S. (2015). *Wings and freedom, spirit and self: how the filmography of Hayao Miyazaki subverts nation branding and soft power*. University Of Tasmania. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.25959/23240111.v1>
- Talbot, M. (2005, January 9). *The Auteur of Anime*. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/01/17/hayao-miyazaki-anime-studio-ghibli-profile#:~:text=At%20Toei%2C%20Miyazaki%20met%20Akemi,couple%27s%20two%20sons%20were%20young.>
- The Japan Foundation, New York (2021, April 29). [EP7] Hayao Miyazaki: Children Entrusted with Hope [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esOg-2GcnMi8&t=6136s>