



The collective Face of Evil

The Collective Face of Evil

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Cover art: Details from “The Third of May 1806,” by Francisco Goya

# The Collective Face of Evil

by Jay Edson

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# Chapter One

## The Collective Face of Evil

*Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.*

*Imanual Kant*

### **Introduction**

The great atrocities of history have been condoned and/or committed by communities, most frequently nations, and have been done in the name of "purity," or some other high ideal. Unspeakable physical, cultural, and psychological violence committed against other human beings is predominantly a collective phenomenon. Only a small proportion of the mindless violence of which the human race is guilty is committed by deranged individuals. This is an important point because it is generally assumed that when individuals and society come into conflict, society occupies the high ground. This assumption is even built into our language. When we wish to use a more or less polite term to define someone we think is an evil person we call him/her "anti-social" or "sociopathic." If our assumption about the moral superiority of society over the individual is untrue, then it will require a serious re-evaluation of some basic assumptions that most of us have. It is a re-thinking that those who stand to benefit from the established order do not want us to undertake.

Does the data available to us support our primary claim here? Getting reliable statistics on important topics is always an iffy thing. If a matter of historical fact is of great significance, then probably someone has an interest in misrepresenting the data. Also when different people collect data they may mean very different things while using the same terms. What is genocide? What is rape? Murder? An atrocity? Torture? Fortunately for our purposes only a rough estimate is necessary. For our measure of "social evil" we will include war, genocide, and obvious examples of destroying the infra-structure of societies,

upon which a significant number of people rely simply to sustain life. We will compare this with the most obvious example of death caused by individual violence, which is murder.

On his web site Matthew White tallies the number of collectively caused deaths in the twentieth century as follows: Genocide and Tyranny: 83,000,000, Military Deaths in War: 42,000,000, Civilian Deaths in War: 19,000,000, and Socially/Politically Caused Famine: 44,000,000, for a total of 188,000,000 unnecessary deaths caused by collective policies during the 20th century. This was lower than estimates by two other researchers on the same topic that he cites. Their estimates were 203,000,000 and 258,327,000.<sup>1</sup> Different ways of counting, different definitions, and perhaps somewhat different political agendas account for the variance. However, it would seem to be a fairly conservative estimate that about 188,000,000 people in the 20th century died from socially created catastrophes, such as wars, genocides and the destruction of social infrastructures. How does this compare with murder?

Basing his estimate on known statistics, and extrapolating from these numbers, White comes up with the figure of 8,500,000 homicides in the 20th century. Granted that this is simply an estimate, his reasoning was plausible, and this probably represents a fairly accurate ball park figure. If we put White's two figures together we have about 8.5 million homicides compared with 196.5 million collectively generated deaths. That means that in about 4.3% of these the death total was the result of individuals acting on their own, and 95.7% of the deaths were the result of the internal and external policies of nations. That is rather striking. Surely it should be enough to raise questions about our assumption that when individuals and societies are in conflict, society generally occupies the ethical high ground.

The lion's share of evil in the world is not created by individuals violating the rules of society, but by societies who violate the rights of the individuals that compose them, and who are not willing to accommodate the legitimate needs of their neighboring societies. Real enemies of society, if they are violent and fanatical, may indeed pose a threat to people, and we may need some protection from them. But first and foremost we need protection from society itself. It was this under-

standing that led to the creation of the Bill of Rights, the Nuremberg Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar documents. The danger is especially great when we are dealing with a society that operates under the illusion of its unassailable purity, as is the case with the United States at this time.

It is curious how often one finds the ideal of "purity" behind the actions and ideologies of groups that perpetrate needless violence on others. Examples abound. The war on drugs. Prohibition. Laws against sex workers. The persecution of gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities. The Holocaust. The Inquisition. The Kumar Rouge. Whether we are talking about physical, sexual, ideological, racial, religious, or ideological purity, the advocacy for and implementation of this ideal is generally a prelude to violence. So much is this the case that whenever we hear the word "purity", or perceive this ideal disguised in the garb of another word, a warning bell should go off in our minds. Is some new carnage being engineered?

How are we to explain this propensity for groups of individuals to do things that most of its members acting as individuals would never do? I am sure that a number of factors come into play, but perhaps we can highlight a few of the most important ones.

### ***Undue Submission to Authority***

People suffer from the belief that if an authority tells them to do something that is plainly evil, they are exonerated from the guilt of doing it. They have, in other words, no responsibility for assessing for themselves what is right or wrong in a situation. This fact of human nature was brought home in the famous experiments performed by Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. These experiments showed that people would administer what they believed to be painful and possibly fatal electric shocks to people they had no reason to hurt, simply because they were told to do so by an authority. For those not familiar with these experiments an excellent summary of both Milgram's work and some follow up studies can be found in this Wikipedia article.<sup>2</sup> Minimally they challenge the equation of morality with obedience, as

when we consider the terms "good child" and "obedient child" to be synonymous.

The experiments done by Millikan focus on how people respond to experts and/or individuals who have been designated by society to establish and enforce social norms. Mindless conformity to the norms and expectations created by such individuals is certainly one aspect of how society is able to get people to do things that, acting on their own insights and inclinations, they would never do. However, there is a more amorphous type of authority. This is the authority of the group itself. People are afraid of "public opinion." We carry around inside our heads a "generalized other" that expects things of us. "They" will disapprove of us if we are not careful. People want to be accepted by, and thought well of, by their communities. They want to do what is done – what "they" will approve of. One of the great ironies of history is that the philosopher Heidegger, who warned people about the power of the "they" himself became an ardent supporter of Hitler. It is easy to be swept along with the crowd. It feels "good." Even philosophers who should know better become seduced. It is difficult to oppose what one's primary social group believes and is doing. It creates anxiety about not being thought well of, about losing the social home to which one belongs, and about the validity of one's own insights. It is difficult indeed.

## ***Eschatological Ideologies***

In their collective activities people tend to come under the sway of eschatological ideologies. By "eschatological ideologies" I mean to designate ideologies characterized by the following beliefs:

- The world can best be understood as a battleground between the forces of good and the forces of evil.
- That we are moving toward a final battle between these two forces that will lead to an end of history.
- That during this battle the evil forces will be defeated and the good will enter into a kingdom (either in this world, or in the

next) that will establish for all times an unchanging (a-historical) social order based on righteousness and purity.

- Christian fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the belief system of the Neo-Conservatives all fit this pattern. They are all eschatological ideologies. That is one of the primary reasons why the world is in such a dangerous state at this time.

Most individuals, at least in their personal affairs, are guided by what might be called a value oriented pragmatism. That is to say they pursue those things that they experience as having value, and they do so in a practical manner. This entails the recognition that the needs, beliefs and desires of others must be taken into consideration as they pursue their goals. I am not suggesting that most people are excessively honest or rational in their personal pursuits. They are not. They are mixtures of rational, irrational, self-serving, altruistic and sometimes even noble thoughts and feelings. But they do not organize their daily interactions with others on the premise that they are themselves paragons of virtue and that anyone who opposes them is an incarnation of pure evil and should be killed. They do not, in other words, understand their personal affairs in terms of an eschatological understanding of reality.

### ***The Influence of the "Super-Elite"***

Not all the forces that contribute to the dangerousness of the times are driven by eschatological fantasies. The money elite of the world – primarily the big bankers and the CEOs of multi-national corporations – are driven by other aims.

In large part the super-elite seem to be driven by pure and unadorned greed. However, it is probably true that some of the economic super-elite sincerely believe that it would be best for everybody if the world were ruled by the elite who have presumably proven themselves in the economic arena to be capable of ruling. Three important facts should be noted about the super elite. First, they manipulate for their own ends the belief systems of those who are susceptible to eschatological thinking. Second, they see any real form of democracy as con-

trary to their ends. Whether their motivations are self-seeking or benevolent, they are aristocrats. Third, whatever their motivations, by promoting policies that increase financial gap between the rich and the poor they are creating a very dangerous situation.

Every week I read articles and see videos done by intelligent and sensitive women and men, who have taken the trouble to know what they are talking about, and who make sensible and creative suggestions about how we as species might move forward without destroying either each other or the ecology upon which we are dependent. My thinking and life are vastly enriched by the work of such people. There are lots of them, actually. I think, so long as there are such people around, the human race is not hopeless. In a later chapter in this book (Chapter III, *The Fundamental Mistake of Civilized Life*) I argue that human beings are not intrinsically evil. I believe I am justified in this fundamentally positive take on human nature, despite the evidence that points toward a less optimistic assessment. But then I notice an unfortunate fact. The thoughtful people are not running the world. Many are marginalized. They are not called by the TV news shows, even when they obviously know far more than the experts who are called. These intelligent and informed people are seldom powerful elected officials or appointees, or CEOs in big corporations. They are not members of the political and economic super-elite. This raises an interesting question in my mind. What does it take to rise to the top of the business and political organizations in our society. Of course there are many charming and sensitive, and perhaps even moral people among the super-elite, but it appears to me that rising to the top generally entails a number of characteristics:

- A fortunate birth. This gives the person access to economic and educational resources that most people do not have, and which also pre-disposes them to be identified with the interests of the very rich.
- A superior degree of intelligence. This is not always the case. With a fortunate birth sometimes a superficial cunning, and an instinct for whom one should hang out with may be enough. But on the average, people who rise to the top probably are more intelligent than average.

- A ruthlessness in playing the highly competitive games that permit success in our political and business institutions. The ability to empathize with others would tend to inhibit the needed ruthlessness and would serve as an impediment.
- Narcissism, and a drive toward self-aggrandizement.
- A willingness to embark on enterprises that will inevitably lead to great human suffering and even death. We see this, for example, in the willingness to exploit the cheapest labor that can be found, and to undercut the ability of workers to advocate for health benefits, acceptable working conditions, or even a living wage.
- A philosophy of social Darwinism that tells the person that since s/he is at the top, s/he must belong there. If the unfit die from malnutrition and preventable diseases, that is just natural selection at work.
- A willingness to set aside the most fundamental requirements of ethics whenever they might impose a limit on personal ambition.

These characteristics paint the picture of a privileged, cunning, ruthless, narcissistic, amoral individual who is incapable of real empathy or of loyalty in relationships that are not self-serving, and who conducts his or her affairs in a Machiavellian manner. In other words, in the language of the mental health field, a sociopath. An intelligent one, to be sure, but nevertheless, a sociopath. If it is individuals with these characteristics that do, on the whole, rise to the top of the power hierarchies in business and politics, then there is little wonder that our collective lives are on the whole ethically inferior to the lives we live as individuals.

Unless definite steps are taken to prevent it, a super elite of the very rich and powerful always seems to emerge. These groups may consider themselves to be the philosopher kings whom Plato felt should run societies. Minimally one can say that these elites are not strong advocates of real democracy – though they may like the trappings of a democracy if they can control it with their money. It is possible that

some members of the super-elite actually do try to act for the benefit of the whole of society. The super-elite do not represent a totally monolithic entity. In general, however, they do band together to protect their privilege and to further the right of a small minority of people to amass and retain huge fortunes at the expense of the rest. The resulting inequities – when they reach a degree of absurdity – invariably produce violence.

## ***Social Distance***

The issue of "distance" between people is also a factor. Interactions between individuals are most often face to face, while collective actions tend to be in relation to people who are more distant from one another. David Grossman in his book "On Killing"<sup>3</sup> makes the point that it is actually very difficult for one human being to kill another one. Soldiers have to be psychologically conditioned to do so. In this context, boot camp can be understood as society training people to be less than fully human, or at least to suppress the innate pro-social inclinations that are built into the species. A good deal of the conditioning in boot camp is focused on teaching the soldiers not to perceive the enemy as people like themselves, with family, friends, hopes, fears, worthy aspirations, etc. Despite the training, many soldiers find it very difficult to deal with the aftermath of having killed – even in battle, where it is the socially prescribed thing to do. Physical as well as psychological distance between the killer and the killed facilitates a willingness to kill. One presumes that the same person who could direct a drone plane to bomb a household of people – with the inevitable "collateral damage" that he/she knows will be a part of the process – would not kill the children and other non-military people with a knife while looking them in the face. A certain amount of collective violence is possible simply because the perpetrators are spared the horror of seeing what they are doing. Cultural and language differences are additional forms of distancing that facilitate socially prescribed killing. The less "like us" and therefore the less human the other person is perceived to be, the easier it is to kill and/or torture him/her. Perhaps the greatest distance is achieved through the process of demonizing the "enemy." Members of the group to be attacked or extermi-



nated are not human. They are not even ordinary animals, for which one might still feel some sympathy. They are monsters – devils. We have been taught that society forces individuals to repress violent and destructive impulses for the sake of harmonious social living. Actually what seems more common is for society to repress those impulses that are most tender, gentle, loving and pro-social.

### ***Some Ramifications***

We have attempted to suggest some of the reasons why, on the average, collectivities and societies – especially nations – are responsible for much more violent and criminal behavior than are individuals. We have touched on eschatological ideologies, the dynamics of authority, the nature of the economic/political super elite, and the role of social distance as some of the factors that might help explain this fact. Undoubtedly there are other factors. Whatever the causes, the recognition that people acting as a part of collectivities do, in fact, tend to be more violent than the same individuals acting as individuals has a number of important ramifications.

Human beings are social creatures. We cannot totally withdraw from participation in the life of our communities, nor would it be good to do so. At the same time, when we evaluate any conflict between society and individuals we should remain open to the possibility that the source of the difficulty may be as much or even more with society than with the individual. The prisoner is not necessarily more guilty than the guard, the judge, the legislature, or the churches that pressed for laws that might be repressive, draconian, misplaced, counterproductive or simply unnecessary. The isolated and eccentric thinker may have exactly the insight that is needed for our survival and evolution.

Authority should always be treated with suspicion. This doesn't mean we don't need authorities, in the sense of people who take the trouble to study this or that aspect of life in detail, so that they can provide us with reliable conclusions. But we should always be aware of any biases that the authorities might have. Are we really getting an objective appraisal, or are we reading a more or less subtle form of propaganda? Is the real aim simply to inform us, or is it to create a particular view

of reality that would be conducive to their interests, or to interests that they serve. Perhaps the most conspicuous examples of less than objective reporting on data are supplied by drug companies, who do the research on the effectiveness of their own products. Anyone who thinks they can trust such research is naive indeed. Experts in all fields can be bought by business or political groups that want the information that is delivered to the public to be tailored to create the right impression. Our society is awash in misinformation, half truths, and just plain lies pumped into the mainstream by "experts".

When their own insights are in conflict with what "everybody" knows, individuals should at least entertain the possibility that they may be right and society wrong. Of course it is also possible that society may be right. But the matter should be resolved by reason and evidence, not by deeply ingrained prejudices, urban legends, moral panics and force.

Radically free speech may be the most important of all the liberties to be protected in a free society. Many people believe that freedom is a value in its own right, and I would concur. But perhaps an important pragmatic consideration might also be brought forward in support of free speech. Think about how often it is that what everybody "knew" turned out to not be so. In these dangerous times it might well be fatal for us to disregard the voices of those who march to a different drummer.

While there are notable exceptions, the fact is that most individuals most of the time are capable of only very limited deviations – whether in thought or action – from the norms and beliefs of their reference groups. This is true whether their primary reference group is a nation, a religion, a social class, a political movement, or a criminal organization. If one wishes to understand why people perpetrate so much needless suffering on others, it is of limited value to look into the evil that lurks in the hearts of individuals. Rather, one needs to focus primarily on the collectivities to which individuals belong and examine the manner in which these collectivities create the conditions that facilitate the ongoing carnage.

## Endnotes For Chapter One

1. Info on genocides and society caused deaths can be found here:  
<http://tinyurl.com/o5uycuw>
2. This is a good description of the Milgram experiment on authority:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram\\_experiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment)
3. David Grossman, On Killing, (Little, Brown and Company, 1995)

## Chapter Two

### Why Our Civilization Is Insane

#### *Introduction*

In his introduction to *Columbus and Other Cannibals*,”by Jack Forbes, Derrick Jenson writes that he thinks this is “the most important book ever written on one of the most important topics ever faced by human beings: why is the dominant culture so excruciatingly, relentlessly, insanely, genocidally, ecocidally, suicidally destructive? ... How could any group of people, no matter how insane, no matter how stupid, actually destroy the planet on which (or rather, whom) they live?”<sup>1</sup> It's a good question. I doubt that anyone has a complete answer, and surely I do not claim to. But if we are to have any hope of curing this illness, then perhaps we need a better understanding of its nature and causes. The purpose of this book is to make a contribution to this understanding.

The full title of Jack Forbe's book is “*Columbus and other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism and Terrorism.*” As a Native American, Forbes writes as a member of a culture that has seen the full fury of western insanity. The central thesis of his book is that western civilization has suffered for centuries from a mental/spiritual disease he calls by the Native American term “Wetiko” – a Cree term which means “cannibal” or a person who terrorizes his neighbors with violent acts. He goes on to explain: “Cannibalism, as I define it, is the consuming of another's life for ones own private purpose or profit”<sup>2</sup> In western parlance, we in the dominant civilization on the planet are collectively insane.

Perhaps one of the clearest illustrations of this madness is found in the words of Christopher Columbus in his description of his first astonishing encounter with Native Americans.

The lands... are all most beautiful... and full of trees of a thousand kinds, so lofty that they seem to reach the sky. And some of them were in flower, some in fruit, some in

another stage according to their kind. And the nightingale was singing, and other birds of a thousand sorts, in the month of November... The people of this island, and all of the others I have found and seen... all go naked, men and women... they are artless and generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but he who had seen it. Of anything they have, if it be asked for, they never say no, but do rather invite the person to accept it, and show as much lovingness as though they would give their hearts... they believed very firmly that I, with these ships and crew, came from the sky; and in such opinion they received me at every place where I landed, after they had lost their terror. And this comes not because they are ignorant; on the contrary, they are men of very subtle wit, who navigate all those seas, and who give a marvelously good account of everything... And as soon as I arrived in the Indies, in the first island that I found, I took some of them by force, to the intent that they should learn and give me information of what there was in these parts. And so it was, that very soon they understood and we them, by what speech or by what signs... To this day I carry them who are still of the opinion that I come from heaven, from much conversation which they had with me. And they were the first to proclaim it whenever I arrived; and the others went running from house to house and to the neighboring villages, with loud cries of “Come! Come see the people from heaven!...”

And he adds, “These people are very unskilled in arms... with fifty men they could all be subjected and made to do all that one wished...”<sup>3</sup>

Now that is madness. As we know, this willingness to destroy a paradise and enslave a people that welcome you with open arms was not an idiosyncratic characteristic of Columbus. He was not more insane than others in his culture. Rather, he accurately reflected the madness of his civilization. And, of course, the Native People were helpless against this insane aggressiveness that was armed with iron weapons.

Have things improved in the last 400 years? When we look around us what do we see? A huge number of people who cannot tolerate life without the aid of drugs – whether illegal, or prescribed. A phenomenal insensitivity to the suffering of others, as we see in the routine use of torture in Abu Ghraib and other prisons. A preoccupation with gaining dominance over others, as in the US drive toward the creation of a world empire. People of all political persuasions bombing one another on a daily basis. Endless war. Religious leaders cheering all this on. The destruction of the ecosphere upon which we depend for our very survival. In some areas we seem to see progress. At least no-one believes slavery is a good thing anymore. Capital punishment is outlawed in most civilized societies, and where it is used, it is used more rarely. Headway with regard to racial equality is very real. There appears to be more acceptance of sexual diversity. Other examples could be cited.

I do not suggest that no progress has been made. But given the huge capacity for destruction our technologies have given us, it appears that our spiritual evolution – that which is needed to save us from our madness – may be too slow and too late. The core problem is that our technological evolution has outstripped our spiritual evolution. Revolvers are now in the hands of Chimpanzees, and mentally deranged ones at that.

In an effort to bring some order to multitudinous facts that give evidence of our madness, I would suggest that we might subsume them all under two overarching symptoms:

1. The continuing emergence of ruthless hierarchies that exploit, repress, and when necessary, slaughter the people so that an elite few might live in comfort off the labor and suffering of the rest. We are all familiar with Stalin, Hitler, and Bush. Certainly these are examples of people who were deeply infected with the madness. Paul Levy, for example, wrote a book entitled *The Madness of George Bush*.<sup>4</sup> Using a Jungian frame of reference, he argues convincingly that Bush is insane. Unfortunately, as in the case of Columbus, Bush was simply a reflection of a larger madness – an assessment which was the point Levy was making.

2. And now a second symptom of the madness of civilization has surfaced: governments and unregulated multinational corporations and banks aggressively pursuing policies that are known to endanger the ecological balance of the earth as a whole, very likely making it uninhabitable by the human species.

The diagnosis seems clear. Western Civilization is mad. Perhaps other civilizations are, or have been, mad as well. We will touch on this point shortly. But the primary focus of this essay will be the madness of our own civilization. That is what we know best.

### ***The Primary Locus of the Madness Is In Society Itself***

As I have attempted to make some sense of this astonishing and confusing world we inhabit, I found the discrepancy between two kinds of data most confusing. When I encountered people on a personal basis I found them, on the whole, to be decent human beings who would be quite incapable killing or torturing other human beings, or even inflicting unnecessary suffering on them. Ordinary people did not seem especially saintly. Even the most altruistic had feet of clay. But most people did not seem to be killer apes or monsters. Yet every day I read of the horrendous things that were being done on the political level: torture and killing in the name of fanatical delusions, lies and deceit.

It was strange. What was going on here? Then I became aware that the truly great atrocities were almost all committed by nations and groups rather than by individuals. Certainly nations kill many more people than do their private citizens. This led me to suspect that the primary locus of the difficulty might be more in the collective rather than the individual sphere.<sup>5</sup>

A second discrepancy also forced itself into my consciousness. I think it came home to me most forcibly one day when I took a plane trip. I was amazed at the technology. It enabled this huge hunk of metal I was on to get off the ground, fly through the dark at two-thirds the speed of sound, and arrive at a fore-ordained destination without mishap. Then I thought of other uses of the airplane. I thought of the

fire bombings during the Second World War, and the atomic blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How was one to understand such a discrepancy between the incredible technical intelligence of creating an modern airplane, and the utter stupidity and brutality with which we handle our political affairs – especially those between nations and different ethnic groups?

This was more than strange. It was surreal. If our propensity for transforming heaven into hell, as Columbus did, was not a matter of stupidity, what then? In general two possible explanations offered themselves. Either we really were hopelessly evil or we were insane. For reasons I will come to shortly, I decided that insanity was the more accurate diagnosis. Given the collective nature of the wrongness from which we suffer, the most reasonable hypothesis was that our civilization is itself psychotic. It is mad. As individuals we imbibe this madness, and we reflect it in our thinking, our feelings and our actions. We have some responsibility for how we respond to it. But we did not create this madness, nor are we as individuals its primary location.

Having come to the conclusion that we are collectively mad, I was pleased when I ran into the books by Levy and Ford. On all major points I am in agreement with them. But believing that complex matters can sometimes be fruitfully explored from a variety of angles, I wished to explore this issue from a slightly different perspective. My own professional background in social work predisposed me to see human dysfunction as something that emerges out of a problematic interaction between individuals and the societies they belong to. So it is from psycho/social perspective that I will attempt to add some clarification as to the specific nature of the madness that we inhabit.

## ***Are We Hardwired as Killer Apes?***

There is a certain plausibility about the idea that we are a war-like species because this kind of aggression is hardwired into our biology. Chimpanzees in the wild, after all, are known to conduct wars on other bands of chimps. They are one of our closest relatives. But so are bonobos, who are far less prone to such violence. In any case, arguing from one species to another is, at best, rather speculative. So



that kind of evidence did not seem to lead to anything conclusive. In time I discovered two rather compelling kinds of evidence in support of my disinclination to accept the “killer apes” theory of human violence. The first bit of solid evidence I became aware of came from a book entitled *On Killing* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman.<sup>6</sup> There I learned that War Historian S.L.A. Marshall came to the conclusion that under actual conditions of battle no more than 25% of combatants were willing to try to kill an enemy soldier. Grossman quotes Marshall as follows:

It is therefore reasonable to believe that the average and healthy individual – the man who can endure the mental and physical stresses of combat – still has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility ... At the vital point he becomes a conscientious objector.<sup>7</sup>

Although there was initially considerable resistance to accepting the truth of this observation, further research came to provide overwhelming support of Marshall's observation. This evidence does not support the “killer ape” theory. Quite the contrary. It was discovered that there was such resistance to killing that very aggressive techniques had to be instituted in boot camp to overcome it. There were exceptions. A small minority of men exhibit no such resistance. Grossman believes about 2 or 3 percent of soldiers fit this category. As he describes this 2 or 3 percent, and tries to understand them, he touches on the issue of empathy. His remarks on this are instructive:

But there is another factor: the presence or absence of empathy for others. Again, there may be biological and environmental causes for this empathic process, but, whatever its origin, there is undoubtedly a division in humanity between those who can feel and understand the pain and suffering of others, and those who cannot. The presence of aggression, combined with the absence of empathy, results in the sociopath. The presence of aggression, combined with the presence of empathy, results in a completely different kind of individual from the sociopath.<sup>8</sup>

We will return to this issue of empathy.

From a military point of view, the reluctance of the majority of people to kill is a problem to be overcome. Richard Holmes describes the problem in *Acts Of War*.

A soldier who constantly reflected upon the knee-smashing, widow-making characteristics of his weapon, or who always thought of the enemy as a man exactly as himself, doing much the same task and subject to exactly the same stresses and strains, would find it difficult to operate effectively in battle... Without the creation of abstract images of the enemy, and without the depersonalization of the enemy during training, battle would become impossible to sustain. But if the abstract image is overdrawn or depersonalization is stretched into hatred, the restraints on human behavior in war are easily swept aside. If, on the other hand, men reflect too deeply upon the enemy's common humanity, then they risk being unable to proceed with the task whose aims may be eminently just and legitimate.<sup>9</sup>

Let us set aside the question of just how often the aims of war actually are “eminently just and legitimate.” In an odd sort of way Holmes' conclusions are very similar to the message of a well known song from “South Pacific.”

You've got to be taught  
To hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught  
From year to year,  
It's got to be drummed  
In your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught.  
You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,

And people whose skin is a different shade,  
You've got to be carefully taught.  
You've got to be taught before it's too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be carefully taught!

Grossman lists three key factors that facilitate killing. The Richard Holmes quote touches on one of these factors – which is distance. The sort of distance that makes it easier to kill can be either psychological or physical. Holmes is obviously talking about the need to create psychological distance through depersonalizing the enemy. The other two factors are obedience to authority and the support of ones peers. A fourth factor, that is probably less powerful in the immediate situation of battle, is ideology. It helps if we believe we are fighting for a worthy cause.

The data that Grossman offers constitute a powerful indictment against the killer-ape theory. It would simply not be so hard to get killer apes to kill. The same data is equally fatal to the view of human beings as innately depraved and evil. Actually the “killer ape” idea and the “humans as innately evil” idea are probably the same theory dressed up in two different vocabularies.

The second source of evidence about whether a propensity for inter-species violence is an integral aspect of the human genome comes from anthropology. Studies of a variety of cultures reveal a wide range of patterns with regard to this attribute. This little interchange with a man from the Batek culture shows just how non-violent the people in some cultures could be:

The Batek abhor interpersonal violence and have generally fled from their enemies rather than fight back. I once asked a Batek man why their ancestors had not shot the Malay slave-raiders, who plagued them until the 1920s. [They could easily have defended themselves with poi-

soned darts shot from their blowpipes.] His shocked answer was: 'Because it would kill them!'<sup>10</sup>

This sort of consideration for the well being of one's enemies is not what one might expect from killer apes. The disinclination to perpetrate violence on other members of one's own species turns out to be quite common among the members of less complex societies. Some societies are quite violent and some are not. It is an important fact, however, that many societies have been studied in which warfare is unknown, and violence within the group quite rare. Some of these have been complex societies. More have been simpler ones. Minimally this suggests that a high level of violence directed against one's own species is not an invariant aspect of human nature. We must turn then to social factors to explain why some groups of people are more violent than others. It is important to determine what factors correlate with high levels of violence as opposed to low levels.

A common way of categorizing social organization among various groups of people is to divide them into band, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Most of us are quite familiar with states, as this is the organization of modern societies. Yet in archaeological terms this is a very recent development. We human beings have spent over 99% of our existence living in bands. Bands tend to be small – maybe 25 to 50 members on the average. They are egalitarian, and are generally nomadic, or semi-nomadic as they go from place to place in search of food. As anthropologist, Donald Henry, comments, they were quite successful.

The replacement of simple hunting-gathering societies composed of small, highly mobile, materially impoverished, egalitarian groups by a society that was characterized by large, sedentary, materially rich and socially stratified communities represented a dramatic shift from an adaptive system that had enjoyed several million years of success.<sup>11</sup>

Comparative studies with regard to war and the four categories of human organization lead us to a curious fact. As summarized by Jonathan Haas who studied the matter, “the level, intensity, and impact of warfare tend to increase as cultural systems become

complex.”<sup>12</sup> The evidence suggests that serious interpersonal violence of any kind within hunting-gathering groups is the exception rather than the rule. Many of the accounts that intend to provide proof that “primitive” tribes tend to be violent do not distinguish between bands on the one hand and tribes and chiefdoms on the other.

Lee and Daly summarize the anthropological findings about hunter and gathering societies in this manner:

Hunter-gatherers are generally peoples who have lived until recently without the overarching discipline imposed by the state. They have lived in relatively small groups, without centralized authority, standing armies, or bureaucratic systems. Yet the evidence indicates that they have lived together surprisingly well, solving their problems among themselves largely without recourse to authority figures and without a particular propensity for violence. It was not the situation that Thomas Hobbes, the great seventeenth century philosopher, described in his famous phrase as “the war of all against all.”<sup>13</sup>

Or as John Gowdy sums up the matter even more simply, “Judging from historical accounts of hunter-gatherers, for most of the time humans have been on the planet we have lived in relative harmony with the natural world and with each other.”<sup>14</sup>

It would seem that we can lay the killer-ape theory to rest. Yet it is obvious that, short of a nuclear war or some other catastrophe that leaves only a small remnant of humanity to begin again, a reversion to the hunting gathering mode of adaptation is not a realistic option for humanity. Nor is it clear that such a reversion would be desirable. Some values have, after all, been furthered by our evolution. The enhancement of knowledge through science, beauty through the arts, and health through medicine come to mind. In general, our capacity for self-reflection has been increased by civilization. Also, though organized religion seems to have had a generally negative impact on societies, I believe there is great value in spiritualities that open us to new forms of consciousness, that emphasize our mutual responsibility for

each other and that make us aware of our essential oneness with all human beings and, indeed, with all of creation. It is possible, of course, to ask whether we have paid too dear a price for the enhancement of these values. But perhaps the most useful question is whether we can identify those aspects of culture that are responsible for the negative aspects of civilization, and use our capacity for self-reflection to create social structures that will enhance the loving and creative aspects of our nature. Our hypothesis will be that those societies that create and promote individuals who have a high capacity for attachment and empathy will tend to be the least violent. Therefore we now turn to the matter of empathy and upbringing.

### ***The Importance of Early Experiences That Facilitate Attachment and Empathy***

In his influential trilogy on attachment,<sup>15</sup> John Bowlby built on the work of Harry Harlow. Harlow discovered that infant monkeys preferred soft terry cloth mothers to wire mothers even when both provided milk. This suggested that much more than simply physical nourishment was being sought by the infants. He felt that one of the most important motivations for the infant's developing strongly bonded relationships with the adult had to do with the need for protection and safety in a dangerous world. But he also observed that these early experiences of bonding with the mother had important developmental consequences. Females who were deprived of intense nurturing relationships with their mothers were not able to develop normal relationships with their peers as they grew into adulthood. Also, maternally deprived adults failed to bond with their own infants and were abusive and neglectful of them. To quote Harlow, "failure of normal gratifications of contact-clinging in infancy may make it impossible for the adult female to show the normal contact relationships with her own infant. Likewise, maternal brutality may stem from inadequate social experience with other infants within the first year of life."<sup>16</sup>

Bowlby documented the importance of attachment in human relationships. He suggested that attachment was a motivational complex that was essentially independent from either seeking food, or sex. He also emphasized the importance of attachment in the development of indi-

viduals. Mary Ainsworth, a colleague of Bowlby's, set up experiments that studied the effects of short separations on young children, and demonstrated the need that a child has for a secure base from which to explore the world.

It would, of course, be considered by most people to be unethical to repeat the kind of maternal deprivation experiments that Harlow performed on monkeys with human infants, even if it provided important information about the importance of strong early attachment. Two virtual experiments did, however, emerge that threw some light on this question. One such "experiment" took place in various foundling institutions in the United States in the late 1800s and into the second decade of the 20th century. Most of the foundling institutions in which infants without parents were kept were quite clean, and the infants were well fed. However they had a death rate among the infants that approached 100% . The infants were dying from a disease called "marasmus." The term for this disease came from a Greek word meaning "wasting away" which is precisely what the infants were doing. Why did almost none of these infants survive? The obvious was finally discovered. The infants were not receiving a sufficient amount of holding and cuddling. When the homes began bringing in women to provide holding, cuddling, smiles, and cooing the survival rate improved dramatically and immediately.<sup>17</sup>

An older experiment that was documented by the 13th century historian Salimbene is quoted in Ashley Montagu's book, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*. It seems that Frederick the second, Emperor of Germany,

“wanted to find out what kind of speech and what manner of speech children would have when they grew up if they spoke to no one beforehand. So he bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak of the Hebrew language which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he labored in vain because the children all died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces

and loving words of their foster mothers. And so the songs are called 'swaddling songs' which a woman sings while she is rocking the cradle, to put a child to sleep, and without them a child sleeps badly and has no rest.”<sup>18</sup>

While Frederick the II's rather ill-conceived experiment provided us with no information with regard to the original language spoken by humanity, the historian, Salimbene, did not fail to notice that when children were forced to live 'without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers' they died.

### ***How the Self Is Born***

Within the psychoanalytic tradition an important understanding was developed regarding how people as psychological beings come into existence. As I would formulate it, the idea was this:

Our self – that is, who we are in the world – emerges out of our becoming one with, and then differentiating ourselves from, the succession of people we love, and then integrating these internalized others into a coherent identity. This understanding was an overarching construct that was formulated by different theorists who focused on different aspects of the process and used somewhat different terminologies.

In this essay I can only touch on some of the contributions of a few of the key thinkers who helped develop this understanding.

In Freud we see this idea of the introjected other in his concept of the “superego” – the internal representative of societal norms and laws – which has its origin the internalization of the parenting figures, primarily the father, as a means of resolving the “Oedipus complex.”

Margaret Mahler, a key thinker with regard to the emergence of the self, did not see the developmental process as beginning with a self that then internalizes others. She brought the focus of the developmental process back to the first year of life. She came to see the self in its very first stage as being already merged with the mother in a symbiotic oneness. It is only at about 5 months of age that the infant begins to experience a discontinuity between itself and the mother. At



this point the infant begins the process of individuation – of becoming a separate self. But the child continues to return to the oneness with the mother for sustenance. The self develops, in other words, in an ongoing dialectic process of oneness and individuation. We can see this process, for example, in a toddler who ventures out away from the mother to explore, but then periodically has to return for comfort and re-assurance.<sup>19</sup>

As she developed her theory about the dialectic between symbiosis and separation/individuation, Mahler used the language of inner experience. She speculates about the kind of experience an infant might have that would lead it to behave as it does. Bowlby, who we touched on earlier, was skeptical of efforts to describe the subjective states of infants, or to build theories on such speculations. He wanted to ground his theory in the observation of behaviors that can be perceived from the outside. Yet despite their different vocabularies and points of view, the two theorists were actually quite close. Susan W. Coates clarifies this point:

The casual observer might suppose that Mahler is saying that separation is necessary for individuation, while Bowlby is stressing, to the contrary, that individuation occurs optimally only within the framework of secure attachment. But even a moment's reflection will reveal that for Mahler separation from the object is an inner mental process that involves distinguishing oneself from an object who otherwise is libidinally available on a continuous basis. Put in Bowlby's terms, separation is a process that occurs within the envelope of attachment. There are differences between their two theories, to be sure, but they are in agreement on these essentials.<sup>20</sup>

The agreement is that both attachment and individuation are essential aspects of a healthy development. To put it in my words, oneness and individuation are equally important aspects of the ongoing dialectic of growth.

## ***Empathology – The Madness of Our Civilization***

Building on the work of theorists like Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Mahler, my thesis is that as a society we have largely failed to develop the capacity for what I would call individuated oneness. What I intend to convey by this term is our capacity to experience our “oneness” with other people, with other creatures, and with the earth itself, while at the same time maintaining a clear sense of our own boundaries and individuality. The term “empathy” – “feeling with” – is perhaps the single word that comes closest to designating the capacity that we lack. The initial capacity for individuated oneness is formed in the symbiotic relationship with the primary parenting person, and expands from there in the context of loving relationships with others.

Lack of empathy is generally considered to be one of the defining characteristics of the “psychopath,” “sociopath,” or, as it has been more recently labeled, one who suffers from “antisocial personality disorder”. A second characteristic of the sociopath, as he or she is usually understood, is a willingness to disregard the norms of society. Lack of empathy and a willingness to violate the norms of society are two very different and often contradictory characteristics. Consider Thoreau in prison as he protested slavery, Bonhoeffer when he opposed the Nazi establishment, Gandhi when he deliberately disobeyed the English tyrants, Rosa Parks when she refused to sit in the back of the bus, or Martin Luther King Jr. who promoted civil disobedience. Were they sociopaths? Ah, but those are special cases, some might protest. But consider the other side of the coin – the support of, and participation in, projects of the larger society even when they create unspeakable suffering for a great many people. What about ordinary citizens who condone capital punishment, who fail to rise in protest and outrage against the torture of other human beings in Abu Ghraib and similar prisons, who are indifferent to the destruction of the ecosphere, or who condone the terrible suffering inflicted on the Iraqi people through the destruction of their infrastructure – are they not exhibiting a remarkable degree of insensitivity to the suffering of others? I would suggest that very often obedience – being a good citizen – belies a profound lack of empathy for the suffering of others. Perhaps the most vivid experimental evidence of what I am suggesting is derived from

the famous experiments of Milgram<sup>21</sup> when he discovered that people would cause intense pain for helpless others simply because a person who was perceived to be an authority told them to. Also it is worth noting that firm orders by authorities is one of the regular techniques used in the military to force people to overcome their reluctance to kill.

The terms psychopath or sociopath (which are more or less interchangeable) include in their definitions an unwillingness to follow the norms of society and to obey authority. Whether conformity to social norms is a desirable trait depends entirely on the circumstances. To the extent to which society is mad, disobedience is a virtue. It is because of the merging of two quite different, and at times contradictory, concepts that I reject terms such as “psychopath,” and “sociopath.” I wish to emphasize that “good” and “obedient” are not synonyms. So perhaps a new term needs to be coined.

The quality I am concerned with is not disobedience, but a lack of empathy resulting from an inability to attain a reasonable degree of individuated oneness. Perhaps the term “empathology” could be used to convey this meaning. I would define empathology as the inability to resonate with the joys and sufferings of the other sentient beings of which one is aware – human and otherwise. I think I mean something very close to what Forbes had in mind when he used the term “wetiko” in his book *Columbus and Other Cannibals*. As he puts it:

Killing is a serious business and it requires spiritual preparation. Moreover, one should feel the pain or sorrow of killing a brother or sister, whether it is a weed, a tree or a deer. If one does not feel the pain, one has become brutalized and “sick.” One is, in short, out of harmony with the Universe.<sup>22</sup>

Only a little reflection is needed for us to realize that empathy is not an either/or sort of thing. Most of us encounter situations in which we experience great empathy and others in which we do not. Probably the most important factor here has to do with which human beings or other forms of life we see as “like us.” We divide the world into countries, social classes, religions, races, species, etc., and see some of the

people and creatures in these various divisions as being like us, as opposed to others who are not. Those who are like us belong to our group. With those we may feel great empathy, while with others we may be callous and indifferent to their suffering to a shocking degree. Probably the most important indication of spiritual growth has to do with how wide a range of sentient beings we are able to identify with. At one end of the continuum we would find those who care only for their family and a few friends. At the other, those who resonate with all sentient beings.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that a number of other factors influence our capacity for empathy even with people who are in our group. Anything from whether the other person has offended us in some way to whether we have a head ache can influence our capacity from one moment to another. Also, unexpected events may break through our usual defenses and enable us to feel empathy with people we would normally consider to be very different from us. So we have here a complex continuum that allows room for growth.

People who fit on one point or another on the continuum described above are not those who are normally labeled sociopathic. This term is reserved for those whose capacity for empathy is so minimal as to be ineffective with regard to the members of any group or in any situation. This suggests that it might be necessary to expand the terminology I have given for this phenomenon. Perhaps we can speak of “selective empathology” when we refer to the general continuum within which most people fit, and “pervasive empathology” to designate the condition of those who feel little or no empathy in any situation. Thus the term pervasive empathology would correspond in a rough way to the term sociopathology as it is usually used.

In 1941, in his seminal work, *Mask Of Sanity*, Hervey Cleckley<sup>23</sup> gave a description of the sociopathic person that was quite influential. It was his belief that some people were simply born with the inability to develop empathy. Although I disagree very strongly with his assumption that life experiences have nothing to do with why this sort of adaptation to life emerges, he made an interesting observation that is reflected in the title of his book. There are people whose lack of empathy enables them to kill people, cheat them, or manipulate them

ruthlessly with no sense of guilt or remorse. These are the 2 to 3 percent of natural killers that Grossman spoke of. These people seem normal. In fact they are often quite charming. They are able to give lip service to high ideals. They have no obvious delusions, and are able to imitate the behavior of caring people when they choose to do so. They look sane, but are actually quite mad. Needless to say they tend to leave a path of suffering in their wake.

Theorists of many persuasions have very plausibly attributed “psychopathology” to a wide variety of interpersonal and psychological difficulties, from marasmus and failure to thrive, to incapacitating emotional problems in adults, to the absence of an adequate primary bond to nurturing adults. Of particular importance to us in this essay is the association between early attachment problems and serious difficulty in developing empathy with other human beings and living entities – a difficulty that entails both emotional and behavioral maladjustments.

### ***The Connection Between Character Structure and the Social Structure***

James Prescott, in 1975, in a seminal article entitled, “Body Pleasure and the Origins of Violence,” raised some fundamental questions with regard to why some societies (and individuals) are more prone to violence than others. He felt that progress in answering these questions was crucial to the goal of creating a more peaceful world:

Unless the causes of violence are isolated and treated, we will continue to live in a world of fear and apprehension. Unfortunately, violence is often offered as a solution to violence. Many law enforcement officials advocate 'get tough' policies as the best method to reduce crime. Imprisoning people, our usual way of dealing with crime, will not solve the problem, because the causes of violence lie in our basic values and the way in which we bring up our children and youth.<sup>24</sup>

His major thesis focused on the tendency for many societies – our own included – to deprive children and youth of needed sensory gratifications. As he states it:

The reciprocal relationship of pleasure and violence is highly significant because certain sensory experiences during the formative periods of development will create a neuropsychological predisposition for either violence-seeking or pleasure-seeking behaviors later in life.<sup>25</sup>

His first area of concern was infancy. He felt that the “deprivation of body pleasure during infancy is significantly linked to a high rate of crime and violence.” Infants need a lot of cuddling, stimulation and pleasurable interaction between themselves and a nurturing adult. The data he presents led him to the conclusion that our society is seriously deficient in its ability to provide the requisite amounts of such stimulation.

I am convinced that various abnormal social and emotional behaviors resulting from what psychologists call 'maternal-social' deprivation, that is, a lack of tender, loving care, are caused by a unique type of sensory deprivation, somatosensory deprivation. Derived from the Greek word for 'body,' the term refers to the sensations of touch and body movement which differ from the senses of light, hearing, smell and taste. I believe that the deprivation of body touch, contact, and movement are the basic causes of a number of emotional disturbances which include depressive and autistic behaviors, hyperactivity, sexual aberration, drug abuse, violence, and aggression.<sup>26</sup>

His second area of concern involves an even more radical critique of our society. He felt that the repression of sexuality in children and youth was highly damaging.

“Premarital sexual freedom for young people can help reduce violence in a society, and the physical pleasure that youth obtains from sex can offset a lack of physical affection during infancy.”<sup>27</sup>

The data upon which Prescott based his conclusions was derived in large part from primate studies – especially those done by Harlow, which we have already described. Prescott supplements this with anthropological data, and his own neurological investigations. From the combination of these three sources he amassed rather compelling evidence in support of his main thesis.

In anthropological studies Prescott found evidence which is too powerful to be ignored. With regard to early infant stimulation, “Societies ranking high or low on the Infant Physical Affection Scale were examined for degree of violence.

“The results clearly indicated that those societies which give their infants the greatest amount of physical affection were characterized by low theft, low infant physical pain, low religious activity, and negligible or absent killing, mutilating, or torturing of the enemy. These data directly confirm that the deprivation of body pleasure during infancy is significantly linked to a high rate of crime and violence.”<sup>28</sup>

It might be worth commenting in passing on Prescott's concern for “low religious activity.” One may place a high value on forms of spirituality that are life affirming, and non-hierarchical, and that emphasize the need for living in harmony with the order of nature, and still find oneself in fundamental agreement with Prescott. Organized religion has a long history of supporting oppressive hierarchies, of imposing sex-negative norms and laws on people, and of seeing pleasure, in and of itself, as something sinful or otherwise contrary to spiritual growth. This kind of religion should be opposed by thinking and progressive individuals.

With regard to his thesis about the benefits of sexual permissiveness, Prescott also found support in anthropological studies. He points out that “other research also indicates that societies which punish premarital sex are likely to engage in wife purchasing, to worship a high god in human morality, and to practice slavery.”<sup>29</sup>

Wilhelm Reich, a psychiatrist who worked closely with Sigmund Freud during the 1920s, wrote *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*,

which was published in 1933. Throughout his life Reich was concerned with liberating people both sexually and economically from power structures that he perceived to be oppressive and exploitive. During the rise of the Nazi power structure in Germany, Reich observed that “It was precisely the wretched masses who helped to put fascism, extreme political reaction, into power.”<sup>30</sup> This was good for the rich elite, but hardly in the interest of the ordinary citizen. This observation led to the basic question that he addressed in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. “What was going on in the masses that they followed a party whose leadership was objectively as well as subjectively in diametrical opposition to the interests of the working masses?”<sup>31</sup> To answer this question he turned to the psychoanalytic perspective in which he was trained.

Both Reich and Freud believed that society imposed a painful renunciation of sexual freedom on its members, and that the repression of sexuality was internalized to become a part of the character structure of the individual. Freud's term for this internalized repressive voice of society – as funneled to the individual through parenting figures – was the “super-ego.” Reich's concern with regard to the issue of liberation, however, led to a profound break with Freud who was more conservative and who saw sexual repression as being the price that had to be paid for the development of civilization. Reich saw the same internalized structure as a Trojan Horse that consistently led individuals to betray their true interests, and to deny their own most intense desires. Yet if love energy is indeed so strong, what force would be strong enough to oppose it? This is where psychoanalytic theory takes a curious turn. The object of every child's desire is first the mother and then the father. If the father (with the support of the mother) prohibits the expression of sex love – even of a harmless infantile variety – on pain of losing parental love, then the child turns against his or her own sexuality and learns to love and seek the approval of the repressive person. In other words fire is fought with fire. Love turns against love. The child turns against his or her own sexual desire in order to secure the love of the repressive adult. This establishes the character structure of a person who will, for the rest of his or her life, seek the love of authority figures, no matter how repressive they are. In Germany, of



course, the supreme authority figure whose love was courted was Hitler. The Fuhrer.

Reich states that “every social order produces in the masses of its members that structure which it needs to achieve its main aims.”<sup>32</sup> This would suggest that the specific patterns that internalize society's agenda might vary somewhat from one culture to another, or even from one individual to another. It might not always display the exact dynamic that Freud described as the “Oedipus complex.” But the character structure needed for oppressive forms of government always requires two things: sexual repression and an ideology that justifies repression and blind obedience. As Reich sums up the process as he sees it:

“In short, morality's aim is to produce acquiescent subjects who, despite distress and humiliation, are adjusted to the authoritarian order. Thus, the family is the authoritarian state in miniature, to which the child must learn to adapt himself as a preparation for the general social adjustment required of him later. Man's authoritarian structure – this must be clearly established – is basically produced by the embedding of sexual inhibitions and fear in the living substance of sexual impulses.”<sup>33</sup>

Character structure is, in short, the link between child rearing practices and the political sphere.

It is important that the very real contribution that Reich made to our understanding of the relationship of character structure to political dynamics not be dismissed because of his later rather controversial theories about the collection and use of “orgone energy.” With any highly intelligent and creative person it is necessary to sort out what is of value in their thinking and what may have been less productive avenues of exploration.

Prescott and Reich approach the issue of development quite differently. Prescott is oriented to physiological data, while Reich comes from a psychoanalytic tradition. Yet they both come to a similar conclusion: deprivation with regard to loving physical intimacy in the primary relationship, and the prohibition against other erotically desired

relationships ultimately leads to a rigid, authoritarian personality capable of great violence. Prohibition of what people most desire must be enforced with severe threats and/or punishments if it is to be effective. When one encounters these prohibitions and punishments and discovers them to be insurmountable, he or she often ends up seeking the love of the prohibiting and punishing person, thus introducing a sado/masochistic dynamic to the whole process. I am suggesting that something of this sort is the “normal” – that is to say by far the most common – developmental sequence in Western society. This is our madness.

### ***The Central Importance of Persons – Object Relations Theory***

Although thinkers and researchers like Harlow, Reich and Prescott have clearly contributed a great deal of importance to our understanding of human behavior, they all seem to suggest that it is pleasure itself (the orgasm in Reich's case) rather than relationships that provide the conditions for positive human development, and for healing when something has gone wrong. A bias of this sort was embedded in Freudian theory. The Freudian school of thought saw human activity as motivated by “drives.” Hunger and sex are perhaps the most obvious drives we are acquainted with. Interpersonal relationships were driven mainly by the sex drive. The sexual act served the purpose of releasing painful physiological tensions that built up within the organism. It does not seem to me that Freud was entirely consistent regarding this, and his thinking shifted and matured throughout his life. Nevertheless, it is hard to get away from the notion that for Freud the primary significance of other people was that they provided an occasion for gaining release from painful sensations. As the meaning of a piece of pie was that it allowed one to overcome the painful sensation of hunger, the primary meaning of another person was that he or she allowed one to overcome the discomfort of sexual tension.

I would suggest there are two biases that have plagued psychology from its inception. The first is that it should be built exclusively on the basis of observations that are available from the outside. Behaviorism, for example, prided itself on this. “Subjective” knowledge was not

knowledge at all, and introspection was a waste of time. The second problem was the effort in the human sciences in general to reduce human reality to mechanics. Freud, of course, based his theory on information provided by introspection, but was as guilty of the mechanization of human reality as was Skinner. Theories that are grounded in either or both of these biases may enable us to predict and control behavior in some situations. But even their predictive value has its limitations. It should be mentioned, for example, that it was behaviorism that was at least in part responsible for the creation of the marasmus babies wasting away in institutions we talked about earlier. But even when such theories are capable of predicting and controlling, they tell us little or nothing about the psyche – the person qua person. They are psychologies without a psyche.

Thinking that we best understand human beings only from seeing them from the outside and conceptualizing them as machines, is a little like thinking that the equation “32 feet per second per second” gives us significant information about Newton's famous apple. In certain situations the equation can help us to predict and control how an apple will behave, but little else. The apple, qua apple, eludes such calculations. Within their sphere of application physiological descriptions of behavioral events are interesting and in some cases useful. But if we want to understand what it means to be a human being we must access the data of subjective experience and employ a vocabulary that is appropriate to the data. Let me illustrate this point by a love poem:

### **My Amygdala Sighs For You**

My frontal lobes worship your loveliness.

You titillate my sensory cortex

Which craves the opportunity to

brush up against you

accidentally

more or less.

My superior colliculus scans the horizon in hope  
of glimpsing you  
your yellow shorts  
no one else's  
walking by.

I do not mean to stare.

My optic tectum made me do it.

My amygdala sighs

Trembles

as it rummages through my memory cortex  
seeking the sustenance of past images

images of your bright eyes,  
your slender legs  
your shapely t-shirt.

My olfactory bulbs want to snuggle their nose in your arm pits.

The whole of my limbic system

gathers at the foot of your image

Wanting nothing more

than to sit in your general vicinity

while it awaits

synaptic mail

Suggesting to it

Possibilities

of love.

The point, of course, is the inner experience cannot be reduced to that which is externally observable. The matter is complex and can't really be argued here. But it was in large part the desire to conceptualize human beings as "persons" rather than machines, and to understand them on the basis of direct experience and introspection, that led to object relations theory. Above all, object relations theory was concerned about how we as human beings reach out to other human beings, and how the desire for human relatedness is at the very core of what it means to be human. Human relationships are from the beginning the soil in which the ego grows. And they are the soil in which ongoing development takes place. If the soil lacks nutrients, something goes wrong. If it is absent, the person dies.

The word "object" in psychoanalytic theory does not mean object, but subject. I'm not being entirely facetious in this remark. I mean that the term "object" refers to other human beings, as in the "object of my desire." Referring to the work of Fairbairn, one of the founders of object relations theory, Harry Guntrip states that he "makes object-relations, not instinctive impulses, the primary and important thing. It is the object that is the real goal of the libidinal drive. We seek persons, not pleasures."<sup>34</sup> Much of psychoanalytic theory was stood on its head by this understanding. At least in healthy development, relationships with other people were sought out not only, or even primarily, because they offered the possibility of release from physiological tension – though in satisfying hunger or sexual needs they certainly did so – but because interpersonal relatedness was itself the supreme value that people looked for. What then was the importance of physiological desire and the experience of its satisfaction? Hunger, obviously, led to the search for food, and sexual desire led eventually to procreation. Also, pleasure is itself a value. There was no puritan mistrust of pleasure hidden away in object relations theory. However, as Fairbairn put it, "pleasure is the sign-post to the object."<sup>35</sup> At least from a psychological point of view, the primary significance of desire (libido) is that it draws us into important relationships with others.

The babies in the institutions that deprived them of human interaction were well fed and physically comfortable but they wasted away and died anyhow. Survival itself seems worthwhile only in a social context

– in a state of relatedness with other real human beings. And the growth of the self occurs only in such a context. As Guntrip put it, “the basic drive is to self-development and self-fulfillment as a person. The importance of object-relations lies in the fact that without them the ego cannot develop.”<sup>36</sup> And of course, one of the most important accomplishments of the self as it emerges is that it develops a capacity for resonating with others – for empathy. By establishing our relatedness to others as the centerpiece in its theory, object relations theory clarifies how this capacity is learned. It is a corrective to theories that see us simply as self-gratifying organisms, or even worse, as machines. Persons seek relatedness to others in an evolving matrix of relationships. That's how they grow and find meaning in life. When I speak of spiritual growth in this essay I have in mind the growing capacity of the individual for relating to an expanding range of sentient beings, while retaining his or her sense of individual autonomy and identity.

### ***The Teaching and Propaganda Factor***

Reality is multifaceted. I would certainly not claim that in this brief essay I have captured all the factors that contribute to the madness of our civilization. Not everything is determined by our interactions with our primary caregivers in the first few years of our lives. Societies do not create persons who will comply with their aims and rules solely through the kind of early nurturing that is provided. They reproduce themselves also through the teaching and propaganda to which children are exposed as they enter the larger world beyond their homes. Universally children learn that their nation, their religion, and their social class or ethnic or racial group is somehow superior or more human than any other group. If their early nurturing was adequate to facilitate at least some capacity for empathy, as in most cases it is, the growth toward a universal empathy is truncated by such teaching. This creates individuals who are selectively empathologized. They can relate to the members of their own group but are capable of treating human beings from other social classes, nations, religions or ethnic groups with remarkable cruelty. As the world has become a global community, unified as a single system, selective empathology of this

kind is a serious matter. Indeed, given the power that technology has placed in our hands, it could be fatal to our species.

### ***Pulling It All Together***

In an article entitled “The Rise of the Second-String Psychopaths,” David Schwartz tells us that “The great writer Kurt Vonnegut titled his final book *A Man without a Country*. Schwartz tells us what Vonnegut meant by this title:

“He was the man; the country was the United States of America. Vonnegut felt that his country had disappeared right under his – and the Constitution’s – feet, through what he called ‘the sleaziest, low-comedy Keystone Cops-style coup d’état imaginable.’”<sup>37</sup>

Vonnegut was talking about the Bush administration Swartz explains, and goes on to summarize some of Vonnegut's thinking on this matter:

How had our country disappeared? Vonnegut proposed that among the contributing factors was that it had been invaded – as if by the Martians – by people with a particularly frightening mental illness. People with this illness were termed psychopaths. (The term nowadays is anti-social personality disorder.) These are terms for people who are smart, personable, and engaging, but who have no consciences. They are not guided by a sense of right or wrong. They seem to be unaffected by the feelings of others, including feelings of distress caused by their actions. ...They suffer no remorse, no guilt, no shame. They are free to do anything, no matter how harmful. ...

And Schwartz concludes as follows:

It is no secret that the Koch brothers and others of the super-rich seem to have undertaken a final push to consolidate control through the conversion of a marginally democratic to an essentially fascist state; extreme right-wing, authoritarian, and demagogic. This kind of government is

ideal for control of a populace by the moneyed elite. ...Lest the citizenry realize who stole their money and storm their castles with torches, the rapacious elite need politicians who will carry out the work of re-directing anger at teachers, or labor unions, or the poor. I can only conclude that the people who now own the country couldn't find any first-rate psychopaths to carry out their work. Or maybe the smart ones were all occupied. So they had to go to second-stringers, people who could actually believe what they were told to say.

We are a country who has become second-best, even in the quality of our psychopaths.<sup>38</sup>

The diagnosis given here is largely the same as in our analysis. For reasons I have already given, I use the term “empathology” to designate what Vonnegut called “psychopathology.” But, yes. We as a country are mad. I would point out that this madness did not start with the Bush administration. Our current state of madness is one manifestation of a larger madness that has infected western civilization for centuries. But certainly this country – with increasing intensity since the election of Ronald Reagan – has developed an especially pernicious form of the madness.

At this point I'd like to pull together the data and theory that was touched on in previous sections of this paper, and sketch the probable dynamics by which a nation becomes even more mad than average.

One of our core conclusions is as follows:

A deficiency of touch and bodily pleasure in the context of loving relationships – whether caused by neglect, unfortunate circumstances or actual repression – produces both the character structure of the followers of authoritarian leaders, and the character structure of the leaders themselves.

In our society this deficiency is very much in evidence from birth through late adolescence. Tiffeny Field, for example has demonstrated in carefully designed studies that American children touch less and are more aggressive than French children. This study as well as additional useful information can be found at the Touch Institute.<sup>39</sup>



The impact of this deficiency is greatest during the early formative years, but it continues to be a important factor throughout the developmental process. An initial deficiency of touch and loving bodily contact, followed by an aggressive repression of sexuality, produces an individual who for his or her entire life longs for the love of the repressive and punishing parent. This is by far the most common character structure of people in our civilization. It prepares people to be obedient and mindless followers. Typically people with this character structure are capable of a degree of empathic relationships within their own group, but they are quick to demonize any person or group that their leaders tell them to. They exhibit, in other words what we have called “selective empathology.”

A more severe deprivation appears to produce an almost complete incapacity for empathy, or pervasive empathology. It is not true that people with this problem are, as a group, especially intelligent. Empathologic people have the capacity to manipulate others without having to put the human suffering they are causing into the conceptual equations that guide their interpersonal behaviors. For this reason they appear on the surface to be more intelligent than those with a greater capacity for empathy. This is simply because they have simpler equations to deal with. However, if we take those who are both highly intelligent, and pervasively empathologized, we have the perfect Entrepreneur, Banker, CEO, or military strategist in today's ruthless, unregulated and criminal form of capitalism. People simply do not rise to the top of such systems if they feel the pain of the business associates they have deceived and betrayed, the people in the sweat shops that they exploit, the animals that they subject to lives of endless suffering, the deaths, mutilations and birth defects that their wars produce, the employees that they dis-empower, and the environments that they destroy.

Still, the most fundamental problem is not that our leaders are, to use Vonnegut's term, psychopaths. *The problem is that we have a system that requires a person to be a psychopath in order to rise to the top.* Any significant capacity for empathy would be a fatal flaw. By its failure to facilitate physically expressed loving relationships throughout childhood and adolescence our society provides intelligent indi-

viduals who are pervasively empathologized. Precisely these people rise to the tops of our Banks, corporations and political institutions. By the same failure to facilitate loving contact, our society creates a large number of selectively empathologized people who are anxious to seek the love of these leaders. Even so, the specific individuals who are at the top are merely symptoms. Put them all in jail without changing the system and tomorrow you will have a new batch that will look pretty much like the old batch. It is first and foremost in our collective patterns of interaction and organization that our madness resides.

## ***Recommendations***

Character structure and social systems interact to shape history and politics. When problems arise it is generally necessary to intervene both on an individual level, and on a social level. From a political point of view, however, social structures and processes must be given priority. An unchanged social structure will continue to grind out the same old problems. What are the political implications of our conclusions? It is beyond the scope of this article to address this question in any detail. However, it is possible to identify some of the goals that must be given high priority if we want to create a more just and less violent world:

- The encouragement of much more loving physical contact between infants and their primary caregivers, both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- The elimination of both humiliation and corporal punishment in the upbringing and education of children and youth.
- The use of techniques that teach children to think and to weigh evidence rather than to simply obey and believe authorities.
- The increase of sexual education and permissiveness for children and adolescents.
- The use of pedagogical techniques that will imbue both children and adults with ethical and spiritual principles that expand the range of people and living systems with which they are able to empathize.

- The creation of more egalitarian and less hierarchical forms of social organization.
- The development of economic patterns that do not reward those who are the most consumed by pervasive empathology.

## Endnotes For Chapter Two

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2. Forbes, 23.
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4. Paul Levy, *The Madness of George W. Bush* (Bloomington: Author House, 2006)
5. See my article *The Collective Face of Evil*, Ch. 2 of this book, or at OpEdNews.com : <http://www.opednews.com/a/124184?>
6. David Grossman, *On Killing* (Little, Brown and Company, 1995)
7. As quoted in Grossman, 1
8. Grossman, 183
9. As Quoted in Grossman, 186
10. Kirk Endicott, as quoted in Douglas Fry, *The Human Potential For Peace* (Oxford University Press: 2006), 97
11. Donal Henry, as quoted in Fry, 135
12. Johnathan Haas, as quoted in Fry, 100
13. Lee and Daley, as quoted in Fry, 171
14. John Gowdy, as quoted by Fry, 171
15. (1) *Attachment*, (2) *Separation: Anxiety*, (3) *Anger and Loss: Sadness and Depression*
16. As quoted in Ashley Montagu, *The Human Significance of the Skin*, pg. 42.

17. One place where this is described is in Montagu, *The Human Significance of the Skin*, pp 97, 98
18. As quoted in Montagu, pp. 101, 102
19. See, Margaret S. Mahler, Fred; Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation*, (Basic Books Inc. New York, 1975). Especially Part II. She includes an “autistic phase” here, an idea she later abandoned. In essence she came to see Human Reality as profoundly social from birth.
20. Susan W. Coates, *John Bowlby and Margaret Mahler: Their Lives and Theories*. (Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 53,2) pp. 589, 590.
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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment)
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27. Prescott, 12.
28. Prescott, 11.
29. Prescott, 12.
30. Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 10.
31. Reich, 40.
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33. Reich, 30.

34. Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self* (New York: International Libraries Inc.) 21.
35. Guntrip, 19.
36. Guntrip, 92.
37. David Schwartz, *Are We Ruled By Second String Psychopaths?* (<http://readersupportednews.org/off-site-opinion-section/72-72/6203-a-re-we-ruled-by-second-string- psychopaths>).
38. Schwartz.
39. Touch Research Institute. ( <http://www6.miami.edu/touch-research/TRITouch.html> ). This site is full of material that is relevant to this article.

## Chapter Three

### The Fundamental Mistake of Civilized Life

"The Lord of the Flies,"<sup>1</sup> is the story of a group of boys marooned on a tropical island during the Second World War. In both the book and the movie we are presented with a masterful and heart wrenching depiction of the boys descending into barbarity. (The 1963 movie directed by Peter Brooks is the one to see.) The symbols of civilized life are abandoned, and a brutal and primitive social order is established. Two of the three primary advocates of civilized virtues (Simon and Piggy) are killed and the third is hunted like an animal. The message seems to be that if we strip away the civilized veneer, human nature reveals itself as violent, selfish, ruthless and cruel. The images are convincing and this conclusion seems warranted. Yet it is precisely this negative view of human nature that is the fundamental mistake upon which civilization has been built. That human nature is essentially barbaric, anti-social and dangerous is the assumption that justifies all the harsh, cruel and repressive practices that civilization continues to employ to maintain control over its members.

In view of the evidence of history, it would seem naive to question the dogma that is here being presented as the fundamental mistake of civilized life. Is not history, as Stephan suggests in James Joyce's *Ulysses*<sup>2</sup>, a nightmare from which we are trying to awaken? And isn't history the logical outcome of human nature? How are we to reconcile this fact with the idea that the essential nature of human beings is anything other than bestial and brutal, and in urgent need of being brought under the painful yoke of civilized restraint?

In his preface to *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Wilhelm Reich points out that "on the surface layer of his personality the average man is reserved, polite, compassionate, responsible, conscientious."<sup>3</sup> If this were the essential person, there would be no problem. The interpersonal sphere of life on all levels – from intimate contacts to large scale political arrangements – would be characterized by reasonableness, trust, kindness, and compromise. However, such is not the case. In reality we live in a world dominated by selfishness, deceit, exploitation,

cruelty and war. One is forced to concede that beneath this surface level one can always discern a second level which, as Reich suggests, consists of "cruel, sadistic, lascivious, rapacious and envious impulses." <sup>4</sup> It is on this second level, then, that we find the true essence of human nature: right?

Wrong.

According to Reich, beneath this "secondary" level of human reality – which is in fact, cruel and sadistic – there is a more basic level which he calls the "biological core." Of this biological core he says "under favorable social conditions, man is an essentially honest, industrious, cooperative, loving and, if motivated, rationally hating animal." <sup>5</sup> Reich believed that the anti-social aspects of human reality are the result of the repression of primary biologic urges. The terminology that I will develop in this editorial is a bit different from Reich's, probably because my metaphysics are a bit different from his. Also I am convinced that his notion of "full orgiastic potency" was narrow and simplistic, and that this ultimately led him down a number of blind alleys. Nevertheless, it seems to me that his fundamental intuition with regard to the origin of the anti-social, sadistic and untrustworthy aspects of human nature as he spelled them out in *The Psychology of Fascism* is exactly right. These "secondary" aspects of human nature do not reflect the essence of human reality but are the direct result of repression. Because the repression of the natural impulses of human beings has been endemic since the beginning of recorded history, and one presumes for some time before then, history has indeed been a nightmare. To awaken from this nightmare will require a radical shift in our way of understanding who we are. One aspect of this new understanding has to do with the interplay between the psychological and the political levels of reality.

Depth psychology, whether Freudian, Jungian, Reichian, or of any other flavor, has been accused of being myth rather than science. This is not the place to debate the nature and limitations of scientific truth. Let us concede for the moment that in-depth descriptions of our inner realities always take on a mythological character. Perhaps the deepest truths of our inner experience can be expressed in no other way. It can also be admitted that the mythologies of the soul by which we bring

our inner experience into language are always oversimplifications to some extent. Even so, without such mythologies we find ourselves lost in a confusing plethora of impulses and perceptions.

I would suggest that a useful mythology of the soul would track the interplay of five primary characters. In our mythology we begin with the essential self – the exploring, growing, relationship seeking, loving self that comes into existence at birth. In the book *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self* the psychotherapist Harry Guntrip uses the term, "the libidinal self"<sup>6</sup> to designate this aspect of the person. It is his understanding that "libido," the most basic desire-energy in human beings, strives not just for biological release and pleasure, but even more centrally for sustaining and loving relationships. Given this understanding of libido, it would be hard to improve upon his term.

The libidinal self is invariably frustrated by the reality s/he encounters. But an important distinction needs to be made here. It is inescapable, and even necessary, that external reality should frustrate us to some extent. Indeed, growth is dependent upon our effortful responses to such frustrations. But over and above the necessary level of frustration, the libidinal self invariably finds itself assaulted by a totalitarian social structure – mediated through the parents and other care-givers – that seeks to crush many aspects of its infantile motivational structure. Notably sexuality and curiosity find themselves under attack and become saturated with shame. It is this surplus frustration that eventually separates the self from its libidinal mainsprings, and that leads to the creation of the sadomasochistic self—a self that is profoundly alienated from the libidinal self, but which still retains, as it were, at least a memory of the libidinal self.

The sadomasochistic self is the internalization of the conflict between the libidinal self and the social agents of repression – parents, teachers, and other authority figures. The sadomasochistic self is driven by eroticized images of this conflict – images of beatings, repressions and torture. Actually, what we are calling the sadomasochistic self is composed of two sub-personalities – the bad child who is being punished and the stern parental figure who does the punishing. In the jargon of depth psychology the internalized punisher is known as the



"sadistic super-ego." It is this level of the personality that tends to emerge when the shackles of society are removed. We see this most clearly in the *Lord of the Flies* movie in the beating of the naked boy that is overseen by Jack.

Although created by society, the sadomasochistic self feels the need to hide from others. Except in socially approved forms – such as war or in the tormenting of a scapegoated group in society – the sadomasochistic self acts in secret. Its existence is seldom admitted. What is presented to society is a “persona” – the mask that hides the underlying confusion, sadism and unfulfilled or secretly fulfilled lust. This mask is the "false self." The false self is a compliant and often depressed marionette enacting a prescribed social role which is of little or no real interest to the person. This is the "reserved, polite, compassionate, responsible, and conscientious personality" of the average person of which Reich speaks. The false self is a harmless person – and easy to get along with – until someone puts a gun in his hand and tells him its OK to kill enemies, or until s/he votes for a Hitler or a George W Bush and has him carry out the obscene and forbidden but exciting sadomasochistic fantasies in an Auschwitz or an Abu Ghraib, or just in one of the ordinary prisons in this country. Often the false self has forgotten even the memory of the essential self.

Lest the reader think that I am exaggerating about the degree of sexual sadism that is rampant in American prisons, let me provide an example:

*After I was sentenced, I was moved from the county jail to the state prison. During the evaluation the nurse asked if I felt suicidal. I had just got sentenced to sixty-five years. I was a shy timid man looking at life in the "big house." I made the mistake of saying yes. I was immediately ushered off to the maximum-security prison where I was stripped naked and put in a cell containing a mattress and a security camera. That's it. At one time there had been a table fixed to the wall. But it had been removed with a blowtorch leaving a jagged piece of steel behind, so if I really had been suicidal, I could easily have tried to do myself in.<sup>7</sup>*

Perhaps the connection between the psychological and the political begins to become more clear. The child who has been repressed and broken by the original righteous authority figures that have been internalized, then seeks the love and approval of new representations of that same authority figure. That authority figure shows up as the vindictive, repressive and punishing Sky God who is to rule all of society, as the Fuhrer, as the President, or as any of the repressive authority figures one meets in the daily round of activities. The Fuhrer, however he or she might be embodied, is the fourth character in our drama. The Fuhrer is the external representation of the sadistic super ego.

But where has the rage gone? These authority figures, after all, are external representations of the internalized primary persecutors of the young child. But the rage and frustration that a person may have once felt against that authority figure has been re-directed toward an enemy. It is, after all, simply too painful to hate the most important adult figures in one's life. This "enemy" – often a scapegoated member of society – is the fifth major character in the sadomasochistic fantasy as it is enacted on the political level.

Together, these five characters – the essential self, the sadomasochistic self, the false self, the Fuhrer, and the enemy – enact the continuing drama by which all human institutions – families, schools, places of business, armies, churches, and governments – are established in a totalitarian society. The sadomasochistic self is at the very heart of this drama. It is this aspect of the self that bridges the gap between the psychological and social – between the essential self and the society that represses it. It is the sadomasochistic self that holds the entire nefarious process together.

Several dramas can be scripted and enacted based on the characters we have described. Unfortunately most of these dramas turn out to be variations on a theme. At birth the essential self immediately begins to reach out for loving relationships – first with the mother, and then with an expanding circle of people in his or her immediate environment. In so far as these people respond in a loving manner, most children will bond with them. But then, at some point, the child will show an interest in sex. S/he will be caught masturbating, looking at "dirty" pictures, engaging in sex play with a neighbor, running around naked

in an "inappropriate" place, trying to sneak peeks at naked people, or whatever. This will typically be responded to in an aggressively negative manner. At times the response will be quite hysterical. Good children don't do those things. They don't even have those feelings. Indeed, they aren't even curious about such matters. The attack on the child's sexuality is almost always also an attack on his or her curiosity.

When the child goes to school the attack on any residual sexual expression continues, and the child is further weaned away from his or her natural curiosity. What will be learned is dictated by the adults – not by the child's natural interests – not even by the child's "innocent" natural interests. Learning itself becomes a chore and is pursued only for rewards that are extrinsic to the natural joy of discovery. In this way the alienation of the person from his or her essential self is deepened. The few who continue to rebel are diagnosed with socially constructed "disorders" and are medicated into submission. By the time a child is six or seven a rigid and sadistic super-ego has been internalized, and most children have learned to present an entirely false self to the adult world. Life is then, except in the few nooks and crannies where children manage to escape from adult supervision, unimaginably dull. For whatever reason, some children seem to adapt to this regime better than others. But for the overwhelming majority, the sadomasochistic self and the false self have become the dominant forces in the child's life. The character structure needed by totalitarian social orders has been established.

The above scenario helps us understand why "nice" people keep electing ruthless, cruel and repressive leaders to rule over them, and to deal with "enemies." The false self is, remember, only a thin veneer. The false, compliant self wishes to escape the wrath of the sadistic super-ego, who is now embodied in the politicians, judges, teachers, preachers, police officers, and bosses of society. The same harsh super-ego is also embodied in a generalized form in public opinion. But the false compliant self does not wish only to escape the scorn and punishment of the sadistic super-ego. The false self has an insatiable appetite for witnessing "criminals" and "enemies" hunted down, humiliated, and punished—an appetite that is pandered to on a daily basis in newspapers and on TV. The criminals are people who have

helped themselves to some forbidden pleasure (drugs or sex mostly), who have defied the authorities, who have rebelled against the American Empire, or who have simply lost control of themselves in some interpersonal conflict. The mainstream media, which displays these eroticized violent enactments for public entertainment, are the true pornographers in our society.

Although this article is not about therapy, it might be noted in passing that the healing process for people alienated from their essential selves by a totalitarian society must reverse the steps by which the alienation was achieved. This means in some symbolic or non-destructive manner the person must descend from the compliant false self to the sadomasochistic self, and only from there can the reality of the lost libidinal self be perceived.

Because we feel so oppressed by civilization as we know it, many of us find the writings of archo-anarchists quite appealing, and one must admit there is truth in much of their critique of civilization. Yet civilization has also brought us real benefits and has opened doors to new possibilities. It is not civilization in its entirety that is the problem. Rather it is specifically the repression of childhood wishes, desires and sensibilities – including but not limited to childhood sexuality – that is the source of the lion's share of psychosocial and interpersonal suffering that is experienced by us, individually and collectively. This repression is justified by the assumption that the second level of human nature – the sadomasochistic level – is the essential level. It is not. The essential level – the lost heart of the self – is the libidinal self. In our essential self we want fulfillment of our biological needs and urges, including sexual/erotic ones, we want loving relationships with others, and we want to explore new ways of being in the world. The essential self is social from birth. It need not be broken as though it were a wild horse.

The myth of the innocent child is an essential aspect of the mass psychology described by Reich – the one that naturally leads to fascism. By "innocent," "asexual" is meant. We know as a matter of documented fact that children are not asexual.<sup>8</sup> If one is not persuaded by his or her own memories, or by observing actual children, there are many studies that substantiate the point. No informed observer of

child psychology believes children are asexual. And yet, amazingly, the myth persists. We hear it affirmed by people who purport to be protecting the child from harm. Yet affirming the asexuality of a child is not, in fact, a prelude to protecting the child. It is, rather, the prelude to an attack. If we deny the very existence of another person's essential nature with the intention of preventing it from ever finding any self-chosen expression, are we not attacking the person?

In the United States it is common to define anyone under 18 as a child. It is actually illegal for anyone under 13 to have any kind of sex life at all. That is an astonishing state of affairs. But between 13 and 18 society continues to affirm the right to micromanage the person's sex life. Then, when society releases the repression at the age of 18, is it reasonable to expect that the essential libidinal self will simply spring forth, unscathed by years of denial, shame, repression and punishment? The damage has already been done – at a much earlier age. What springs forth when the repression is removed often looks a lot like the chaotic and unintegrated sadomasochistic impulses that were depicted in the “Lord of the Flies.”

The "innocent" child is not the asexual child. The true innocent child is the essential self before s/he has been twisted and mutilated almost beyond recognition by a society that lives in fear of our natural inclinations.

During the 60's we almost had a sexual revolution. It was, as one might expect, accompanied by a great deal of confusion and chaos. Significant social shifts generally are. Nevertheless, things were headed in a positive direction. But this created a lot of anxiety in people. That also was understandable. Because of this anxiety, it was possible for those who feared sexual freedom to sound the alarm and basically turn back the sexual revolution. The result was the existence of a large quantity and easy accessibility of adult pornography in conjunction with the most stringent control of child and adolescent sexuality imaginable. This state of affairs is creating an overwhelming degree of stress for young people. It is not clear at this point whether the sex-phobic aspects of society will succeed in putting the lid back on adult sexuality as they have for child and adolescent sexuality. But it

is clear that putting the lid back on is not the direction in which society needs to go.

In the "Lord of the Flies," Ralph – the primary advocate for civilized life – is saved by an officer of the English navy. Piggy, representing the scientific accomplishments of civilization, and Simon, representing the spiritual, have already been destroyed by the sadomasochistic forces that were released as a consequence of their being marooned. Clearly the order of civilization will be restored for the survivors. The lid will be put back on. But the vehicle of salvation is a war ship, and the boys will be re-integrated into a world society which is engaged in a huge enactment of mutual slaughter. In fact they will be re-integrated back into a society that is always at war – in which the sadomasochistic impulses are always just beneath the surface, and indeed, in which such impulses are regularly channeled into socially acceptable forms of cruelty and violence.

Much of what one sees when repression is lifted is the product of the sadomasochistic imagination. It has to do with sex that has not been integrated into positive and mutually desired human relationships. These negative images are frightening. But it is not sufficient that we simply put the lid back on. We must begin to understand and eliminate the root causes which lead to this nightmare of "civilization" that we are enacting. This must begin with an understanding of the fundamental mistake of "civilized" life: the belief that we are born with impulses and desires that are dirty, intrinsically anti-social, and dangerous. We are born as sexual creatures and as creatures full of curiosity. That is true. But there is nothing dirty, guilty or impure about that. We become anti-social and dangerous to one another only through a process of "socialization" that seeks to crush our essential desires, inclinations and impulses and to replace them with motivational schemes more to the liking of the ruling elites. As we become aware that this sadomasochistic self is not the essential heart of who we are, we will become equipped to demand a new kind of social order.

We can attempt to undo the negative effects of early repression in our own lives. This should enable us to become more accepting of who we are, freer in our relationships, and less violent in our attitudes. The patterns, however, are deeply ingrained. Most of us will be only par-

tially successful. On a political level the most important thing is to raise our children free from the guilt, fear and repression that was forced upon us. To the extent we are able to do this we will have children who know what they want and what interests them, who are capable of choosing whatever loving relationships are most satisfying to them, and who have the capacity to enact scripts that they themselves author.

### **Endnotes For Chapter Three**

1. William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).
2. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986).
3. Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism, third edition* (New York : Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970) xi
4. Reich, xi.
5. Reich, xi.
6. Guntrip, Harry, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object-Relations and the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968 ) 72 ff.
7. Personal correspondence with an incarcerated man who prefers to remain anonymous.
8. See, for example, Chapter Three, *Childhood Sexuality*, by Floyd M. Marinson in Benjamin B. Wolman, Editor, *The Handbook of Human Sexuality* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.).

# Chapter Four

## A Tough Weed To Uproot:

### An examination of the practice of scapegoating

#### *Introduction*

In the year 1350 AD the black plague struck France. The mortality rate varied from place to place from an eighth to two thirds of the population. Often whole families or towns were wiped out. It was the worst catastrophe the world had ever seen. The terror that people naturally felt in the face of such a calamity was intensified by their absolute helplessness to do anything about it.

In order to gain a sense of mastery over an uncontrollable situation, people need a theory about what is going wrong and a strategy for correcting the problem. The theory that the Christian community in France was that the Jews caused the plague. A French poet by the name of Guillaume De Machaut expressed the consensus of the people in his description of the events:

*After that came a false, treacherous and contemptible swine: this was shameful Israel, the wicked and disloyal who hated good and loved everything evil, who gave so much gold and silver and promises to Christians, who then poisoned several rivers and fountains that had been clear and pure so that many lost their lives; for whoever used them died suddenly. Certainly ten times one hundred thousand died from it, in country and in city.<sup>1</sup>*

So there we have the 14th century theory of the plague. The Jews were poisoning the water. It should be noted that Guillaume interprets this as a defiling of what is pure, and this, of course, was how he understood the effect of the Jews in general. They defiled the purity of the dominant community.



When God made it clear to the Christians that the Jews were poisoning the water, the strategy for dealing with this was obvious. Without a shred of shame, Guillaume describes the chosen solution:

*Then every Jew was destroyed, some hanged, others burned; some were drowned, others beheaded with an ax or sword. And many Christians died together with them in shame.*<sup>2</sup>

The Christians who died with them in shame were those who collaborated or sympathized with the Jews.

Guillaume's narrative is offered as a justification for the slaughter of the Jews. It is a sobering thought that the Christians who participated in the slaughter of the Jews in the middle of the 14th century genuinely believed that they were acting on behalf of purity, decency and goodness. Guillaume justification of the slaughter becomes for us a cautionary tale. It suggests that the great collective atrocities of humanity were generally motivated by a profound sense of righteousness – often accompanied with the conviction that the gods themselves ordained the unspeakable cruelty inflicted on others. One must especially beware the idea of “purity.” An immeasurable amount of pointless suffering has been perpetrated on people in defence of that dubious ideal.

Almost anyone would see in the events described above a classical example of scapegoating. We are much less likely to recognize scapegoating in our society. Without recognizing it, the prospects for preventing its damage are slim. It is the problem of recognition that I want to zero in on in this essay.

## ***A Definition of Scapegoating***

We can begin with a dictionary definition. Merriam Webster defines the scapegoat in the following way:

*1: a goat upon whose head are symbolically placed the sins of the people after which he is sent into the wilderness in the biblical ceremony for Yom Kippur.*

*2a: one that bears the blame for others b : one that is the object of irrational hostility.*

The relevant Jewish scripture is Leviticus, 16, 7-10:

*And he [Aaron] shall take the two goats, and present them before the lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.*

Here we have something a bit different than the example with which we began. In this ceremony the goat is understood to be innocent, and is chosen randomly. The sins which belong to the people of Israel are projected onto the goat, which is then driven out of the community, into the wilderness to wander until he dies. Here the persecutor understands that he is guilty and the the scapegoat is innocent. This is a more conscious form of scapegoating, and is for that reason less lethal. Only a goat ends up being sacrificed.

The psychiatrist, Saul Scheidlinger, examines the nature of scapegoating in groups of children. He suggests that discussions about scapegoating in the past may not have been as productive as one might wish because it is “depicted in such a loose and varied fashion as to preclude an adequate understanding of what is involved.”<sup>3</sup> He offers the following definition:

*In psycho dynamic terms, scapegoating constitutes a group defensive manifestation, a shared fantasy or act, designed to deal with unacceptable emotions, such as hostility, sexuality and guilt.<sup>4</sup>*

In this definition he emphasizes some dimensions of scapegoating that I believe are crucial. It is a social process that is aimed at defending a group from a perceived danger. Shared fantasies are understood to play a central role in this process. Scheidlinger would limit the use of the term “scapegoating” to situations where the aim is to get rid of unacceptable emotions. I feel that his definition is unnecessarily narrow

at this point. The dangers, real or imagined, against which groups attempt to defend themselves are quite diverse. However, it seems to me that in many cases which appear quite different on the surface, we can discern a common thread that justifies our intuitive sense that we are dealing with a single fundamental dynamic. I have tried to capture what I believe that common thread is in the following definition:

*Scapegoating is a strategy used by a group to ward off real or imagined threats to its integrity and safety by imputing an irrational degree of blame for the dangerous circumstances to an individual, member or subgroup, which is then attacked and ostracised.*

There are five essential elements in this definition which need some clarification.

**First**, scapegoating is a social strategy, not simply a matter of one individual blaming another one for something, and it must be understood in terms of group concerns and dynamics.

**Second**, scapegoating is always focused upon a real or imagined threat to the group. The wide variety of dangers that might be at issue is what gives rise to the feeling that we may not be dealing with a single phenomenon at all. The danger may have to do with forbidden or stigmatized ways of feelings that threaten the identity of the group and its members, and must therefore be disowned through projecting them onto a scapegoat. The threat may have to do with interpersonal hostilities that threaten the cohesion of the group. It may be that forces of change or social evolution threaten the group by bringing into question its identity or coping mechanisms . The group may be threatened by a plague, or by an external enemy, or simply by a humiliating event. Granted these are very different kinds of danger, but if the way of dealing with these threats involves projection, irrational blame, and an attack on the individual or group blamed, with an ultimate aim of casting him or her out, then I think we dealing with variations on a common dynamic that can very appropriately be called scapegoating.

**Third**, there is a large element of irrationality in the degree of blame that is cast on the person or group chosen to be scapegoated. This is not to say that the scapegoat is always innocent. There may be something the scapegoat does that draws the fire. The scapegoat may

even do something that is objectively a threat or a problem to the larger group. Or the scapegoat may be quite innocent. For the phenomenon to qualify as “scapegoating” there must simply be an *exaggerated or unrealistic* assessment with regard to how dangerous and guilty the scapegoat is, and as a consequence, an overreaction to the situation.

**Fourth**, in scapegoating we always find a degree of demonization. The scapegoat is not quite fully human in the eyes of the scapegoaters.

**Fifth**, The ultimate aim of the scapegoating is to cast out the evil through ostracising the scapegoat. He or she must be driven into the desert. In these days the desert is likely to be a prison or a mental hospital. Or perhaps it takes the form of deportation. In many cases it is simply a matter of quiet ostracism. The common dynamic is simply that the group rids itself of the perceived threat to its existence or well-being by driving the scapegoated person or group into the desert.

### ***The Shared Theories of the Scapegoaters***

As a social way of dealing with a danger, scapegoating is driven by a shared theory about what makes things go wrong, and what needs to be done to protect the threatened group. This theory begins with the sense that we are sustained by an order of things which is ordained by the gods or by a single supreme deity. Things go wrong – plagues occur, fire rains down from the sky, the crops are destroyed by drought, the social order falls into chaos, the enemies overrun our borders, the economy fails etc. – because people act in such a way as to violate this ordained pattern of how things should be. Women wear men’s clothes. Slaves ask for a say in things. The races intermarry. Ordinary people try to preform priestly tasks. Boys grow long hair. The flag is trampled underfoot. The rituals are neglected. The mores that have been passed down through the generations are ignored. And because of this, to use Yates imagery from “The Second Coming,”

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...*

The specifics vary from culture to culture, but any deviation from the the established order and the expected pattern of behavior will always

be a source of anxiety. Order – and specifically the status quo – is established by divinity and disregarding it will bring down the retribution of the gods.

The enemy with which the collective theory of scapegoating is concerned is always within the city walls. He is the foreigner or the minority that we have permitted to live within our borders. He is the eccentric within our town. He is the disobedient son within our house. He is the rebellious impulse within our own soul. He is whoever or whatever that is rebelling against the mandated order. The inner enemy always has the capacity to defile – to destroy the purity of the collective self. He or she must therefore be excluded from the rest of the population. Excluding the enemies within the borders is fairly easy when they are other people. Other people can simply be burned, hanged or beheaded, as in our first example. Or in more civilized times they can be sent to prison, committed to a hospital, expelled from the country, placed on registry, or simply ostracised. But if we are dealing with an enemy that is lodged in our own souls it is a far graver matter. If the structure of our desire is not what the gods ordain, what then? This structure of desire must be projected onto a scapegoat who is then driven into the wilderness.

In Jungian terms, a structure of desire which is not socially acceptable, or which is egodystonic, and which is consequently a source of embarrassment, shame and guilt when we become aware of it, becomes the kernel around which the shadow develops. The shadow is all that is within us that we consider unacceptable. It includes weaknesses well as disgusting or unacceptable wishes. The shadow may be so common as to take on a collective aspect. The boy masturbating under his covers to some delicious fantasy is the shadow of the little upstanding citizen sitting obediently in church or waving his hand in the air at school to gain recognition by answering the teacher's question. This, of course, is a shadow common to all boys. When scapegoating is concerned with disowning unacceptable feelings, it will always concern feelings that are sufficiently common to warrant collective action.

The dynamics of scapegoating may be embodied in rituals that take place on a regular basis in a community. After all, we are always viol-

ating the mandates of the gods, in our desires if nowhere else. But whenever a people finds itself in a crisis – whether it be a plague, an economic disaster, a humiliating situation, a political danger, or a social upheaval – the dynamics of scapegoating will tend to be especially intense, uncompromising, and lethal. This disaster is coming upon us because we are impure. It becomes an urgent matter that we purify ourselves inwardly to prepare ourselves to meet the enemy.

In the Jewish scripture one finds this theory of why things go wrong articulated quite clearly. But they were not unique. An article in the Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, describes the practice in ancient Greece. Human scapegoats (*pharmakos*) were used to mitigate a plague or other calamity or even to prevent one.

*The Athenians chose a man and woman for the festival of Thargelia. After being feasted, the couple was led around the town, beaten with green twigs, driven out of the city, and possibly even stoned. In this way the city was supposedly protected from ill fortune for another year.*<sup>5</sup>

In Sophocles *Oedipus*, it is noteworthy that the play opens with a plague in the city of Thebes, which was apparently caused by the unintended impiety of Oedipus, who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. The scapegoat that Oedipus must find and drive into the wilderness is the murderer of the former king, Laius. This of course, turns out to be Oedipus himself. All the themes we have identified as underlying the scapegoat theory of why things go wrong are included here. We have a catastrophe, the plague, brought on by impiety. And this catastrophe can be cured only by identifying the guilty one, and driving him from the city into the wilderness to die.

We have already shown the scapegoat theory of catastrophes was operative in 14th century Christian culture. In “The Golden Bough” Frazer gave numerous examples of scapegoat myths and ritual practices from a wide variety of cultures.<sup>6</sup> The human sacrifice that the Aztecs performed would be an well known example. A particularly egregious modern example with which the reader will undoubtedly be familiar would be the scapegoating of the Jews, Gypsies, mentally ill, mentally retarded, and homosexuals in Hitler’s Germany. We have an-

other example in Stalin's treatment of political dissonants as Russia's primary scapegoats. The functional equivalent of the "will of the gods" in Russia at this time was "the inevitable unfolding of History." It was this dynamic that created the infamous Gulags. Indeed, the evidence is that every civilization that has ever existed has endorsed what we are calling the scapegoat theory of catastrophes. In broad outline this theory entails the following beliefs:

1. Catastrophes are caused by people or groups who defile the collective life with some kind of impurity.
2. These impurities lead to catastrophes because they offend the gods by deviating from the divinely sanctioned order of things. They are not "natural."
3. The means to protect the community from the threatened catastrophe is to purge the community of its impure elements.

I am not suggesting that these beliefs are clearly articulated in the minds of those who carry out the scapegoating functions of a society. Rather, it is this *implicit* belief system that underpins the understanding of life that leads to scapegoating. I have simply tried to make explicit in the three points listed above.

### ***The Sin of Masturbation***

Both the dynamics and the beliefs associated with scapegoating are well illustrated by an example from 19th century Europe. Throughout the greatest portion of that century a peculiar and hard to explain moral panic about masturbation dominated the minds and behavior of people and led to a variety of dysfunctional counter-measures. Doctors, educators, and the clergy were in agreement on the subject. Masturbation caused a huge variety of mental and physical misfortunes, ranging from insanity to almost any physical illness or disability one could name. It was a sin against God, and threatened to cause the degeneration of the species. Given what was at stake, no measures to deal with the matter were too extreme.

The opinions of Monsignor Dupanloup, an educator and the head of a prosperous school for boys, were typical of the times. He described masturbation as as being “like a plague:”

*Professors, Directors, Superiors, open your eyes and be vigilant! For there is the enemy, the formidable enemy: if it penetrates, if it enters, it will devastate your house, it will destroy everything, it will pile victims upon victims, dead bodies upon dead bodies.*<sup>7</sup>

Given the seriousness of this crime, it was natural that Dupanloup recommended “an immediate and merciless repression” of the practice whenever a boy was caught. Otherwise this “horrible wound will spread and ravage everything.” He boasts that he “once had to advise the head of an establishment that the evil had invaded, to send home sixty nine students; he did it, and saved his house; and it is today one of the largest and most prosperous educational establishment in France.”<sup>8</sup>

One suspects that if they actually had caught and expelled every student who was guilty of the practice, they would not have remained one of the largest educational establishments in France for long.

Dupenloup’s school was threatened by an act that violated the divine decree. The sinful ones – the masturbators – defiled the entire school by their private acts, and were seen as a threat to civilization itself. I suspect that the underlying threat with which the warriors against masturbation were struggling had to do with a cultural upheaval. The authoritarian, patriarchal and puritan understanding of life was losing its grip – its stranglehold if you will – on society. The child’s most common expression of sexuality became the battlefield for this struggle. The end of civilization, at least as the Dupenlouns of the world understood it, was, in fact, inevitable. And of course, the solution, the expulsion of the polluters, was typical of the scapegoating dynamic.

A very important aspect of scapegoating can be seen in this example. Scapegoating prevents learning. The scapegoaters cannot learn *because they think they already know*. There is no need to listen to the scapegoats. Indeed, to do so would be to expose themselves to pollut-



ing thoughts. If they had listened to the boys I am sure the good doctors and educators of the time would have learned that these boys “abused themselves” because it gave them pleasure and because it comforted them in a world that was often lonely and harsh. Or if they had been able to listen in at an adult Masturbators Anonymous group they would have learned that none of the dire consequences that were predicted to flow from masturbation actually came to pass. But, as always, *the narratives of the scapegoats were excluded from public discourse*. And two centuries after this moral panic got under way, we have still not learned. Not many years ago, Joycelyn Elders, the Surgeon General of the United States lost her job for the modest proposal that masturbation be mentioned in the public school’s health curriculum. Even now, it is too shameful a thing to mention.

### ***The Scapegoat as a Shadow Figure***

As one closely observes the dynamics of scapegoating, a peculiar ambivalence toward the scapegoat is frequently noticed. This may be in part because the scapegoat is perceived as being very powerful. After all, he or she has the capacity to pollute the collective life of a whole group. Because of this power, the scapegoat may also have the capacity to bring healing.

The scapegoat is a shadow figure. There is a peculiar ambiguity about the shadow. The shadow may represent simply that which we don’t find attractive about ourselves, or that which must realistically be kept under control if we are to live in a civilized manner. But the shadow may also contain energies, impulses, and longings that have been rejected by a rigid, arbitrary or puritanical consciousness that does not understand the requirements of wholeness. In this case the shadow figure comes to represent exactly that which must be incorporated into conscious and social life if wholeness is to be regained, or if the evolution of consciousness is to continue. The shadow figure may indeed threaten the status quo, but does so as a prerequisite for ushering in a new individual and collective way being in the world. The shadow figure, who is at first persecuted, and then scapegoated, may eventually become the healer or the savior. This is the guiding myth of the

synoptic gospels. Understood in this way, the Christian story is truly a redemptive myth.

## ***From Scapegoated to Scapegoating – The Christian Example***

The brutal persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire is one of the best known examples of scapegoating. It is ironic that groups who have been subjected to scapegoating when they are politically weak sometimes become ruthless scapegoaters when they gain power. The practices of Christians during the Inquisition of the 14th and 15th centuries AD were as cruel as anything Rome ever perpetrated during its time of dominance. Women who were believed to be witches were targeted along with anyone suspected of heresy. So many women were tortured and executed during this time for being “witches” that it has been justifiably referred to by some historians as the “women’s holocaust.” But numbers sometimes make us numb. Perhaps the horror that the practice of scapegoating can create in people’s lives can best be captured in a specific incident. Here is part of a letter by Rebecca Lemp, who was caught in the lethal net of the Inquisition in 1590 A.D. She is writing to her husband.

*O you, my most chosen treasure, should I be torn from you so innocent? May such be ever and always held against God. They force one, that one must confess. They have martyred me. I am as innocent as God in heaven. If I only knew the least bit of such matters, then I would deserve that God refuse me entrance into heaven. O you, beloved treasure, what is happening to my heart? Alas, alas, my poor orphans. Father, send me something so that I may die. I must otherwise despair as a martyr. If you cannot do it today, do it tomorrow. Write to me within the hour.<sup>9</sup>*

## ***A cost benefit analysis***

Whether we are dealing with a child being tormented and ostracised. by his or her peers because of some perceived and unacceptable difference, or with whole nations purging themselves of those individu-

als and groups who are perceived to threaten their well-being, scapegoating produces a huge amount of suffering and solves very little. It is a form of darkness that humanity can ill afford if it is to find its way out of the quagmire of endless war and violence that now threatens its very existence. That scapegoating is not a good way to solve problems is so obvious that it hardly seems to merit saying. Still, it is perhaps worthwhile to spell out some of the specific disadvantages of scapegoating:

- It stands in the way of learning and understanding and thereby blocks real solutions.
- It enables the persecutor to refuse responsibility for his or her own shadow – which can then act out unconsciously at will.
- It is unnecessarily cruel and inhuman toward the victim.
- The community's possibilities for growth toward wholeness are lost.

If the practice of scapegoating is so destructive to both individuals and society, we must ask ourselves, why then is it such a tough weed to uproot? There are two reasons for this. First, scapegoating is invisible to the persecutors. Modern people may be more sophisticated than Guillaume who provided us with the example with which we began. We can easily see through the beliefs that led to his condoning the persecution of the Jews. Yet our sophistication may at times simply enable us to be more sophisticated in deceiving ourselves. Scapegoaters genuinely believe that they are assessing in a realistic manner the guilt of the scapegoats. They do not believe, therefore, that they are scapegoating. It is this unconsciousness that makes the scapegoating invisible to the one doing it. As Girard says:

“Those in our day who are the most proficient in discovering other people's scapegoats, and God knows we are past masters at this, are never able to recognize their own. ... We have only legitimate enemies. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats.”<sup>10</sup>

The other reason scapegoating is so hard to uproot is that it is overdetermined. It serves many social functions, some of which have already been touched upon:

- It provides a theory and a remedy that enables people to conquer feelings of helplessness when groups are faced with problems that seem overwhelming.
- It enables people to disown unwanted feelings or attributes.
- It provides a community with boundaries and identity.
- It provides a common enemy and thereby facilitates group cohesion.
- It enables groups to neutralize interpersonal and inter-group hostilities by displacing them onto an agreed upon scapegoat.
- It enables people to repair an injured self esteem or overcome a stigmatized social status by pushing someone else down.
- It allows the leaders of a country or a group to distract its members from problems and issues that they do not want people to examine too closely.
- It provides employment and status to members of the bureaucracy that grows up around it.

The cost of scapegoating is high and the benefits are illusory. Still, a weed that appears to provide so many benefits is a hard one to uproot even if it poisons our individual and collective lives and may ultimately be fatal to humanity. <sup>11</sup>

Because it is so difficult to see the forms of scapegoating practised by our own groups or nation, it is well to ask whether the process could be alive and well in the groups to which we are loyal. Otherwise we might ourselves be deceived. We would like to think that “we” – all of us in the the group or nation with which we identify – have put such primitive practices behind us. We have enemies, but not scapegoats.

## ***The Pedophile As Scapegoat***

In the United States today our primary scapegoat is the “pedophile.” I put the term in quotes as it is often difficult to tell what is actually meant by the term. A dictionary definition is simply “*a person who is sexually attracted to children.*” In the popular mind, however, a more accurate definition would be “slime-ball.” The pedophile is understood by almost everyone in this country to be a dangerous monster. Little distinction is made as to whether he (and it is almost always a man that the public has in mind) never acts on his impulse, engages only in mutually desired activities, or rapes and murders little children in the woods. A pedophile is a pedophile. Without any differentiation as to the fine points regarding what he has or has not done, he is regularly linked in the rhetoric of the main stream media, and in the public's mind therefore, with rapists and serial killers.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine this issue in the detail it deserves. My intent here is simply to demonstrate the truth of Girard's observation that “those in our day who are the most proficient in discovering other people's scapegoats, and God knows we are past masters at this, are never able to recognize their own.” In order to clarify this point I will briefly examine how well the current hysteria about “pedophiles” fits the five aspects of the definition that were given previously.

**The first point is that scapegoating is a social event.** This seems almost self-evident but a brief review about how the hysteria about dangerous pedophiles got under way in the early 1980s might serve to drive this point home. The sex abuse panic was largely a result of the rhetoric of a number of militant feminists who were rather inclined to demonize men in general, and who were especially concerned with issues of power. The pedophile, the selfish individual who takes advantage of the weakness of innocent and helpless children, was a perfect image for their political purposes. The hysteria, fanned by a sensationalist press, grew and reached a crescendo in the Satanic panic of the late 1980s with the lamentable attack on perfectly ordinary daycare centers.

Recovered memories and highly suggestive interviewing techniques by social workers and police officers fed the flames. Satanic pedophiles were everywhere. An entire mythology emerged around the satanic pedophiles. They had “breeders” who gave birth to children for the sole purpose of sacrificing them to Satan. Children at daycare centers were raped, made to kill other children, tortured and threatened. Somehow, despite this ill treatment, they were returned to their parents at the end of the day in reasonably good condition. The level of social psychosis in evidence here was equal to the Christian fantasies in the middle ages about Jews eating babies, or the delusions that led to the Salem Witch trials. Nor was it just a small and unstable portion of the population that bought into this psychosis. Innocent people were accused of heinous (and impossible) crimes and sent to prisons with lifetime sentences with the approval of the public. The entire culture was under the sway of a psychotic mythology. I have written a more complete description of this phenomenon elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

**The second element in the definition of scapegoating – that he is believed to represent a serious threat – is also self-evident.** In fact nothing could have represented a greater threat – if the stories were true. The well-being of our society's children was at stake.

Recovered memories as an accurate and reliable means of retrieving real personal histories has been effectively debunked.<sup>14</sup> The loose interviewing techniques have been challenged and, to some extent, corrected.<sup>15</sup> Yet the curious thing is that the hysteria continues almost unabated. One of the problems is that very little was said in the popular press about the debunking of the satanic legend, or about the falseness of recovered memories. It was seldom mentioned that society was grossly overestimating the number of children who actually are subjected to violent sexual acts. Or that the overwhelming majority of the missing children on the milk cartons had nothing to do with pedophiles. Professionals stopped talking about recovered memories and both social workers and police officers got some better training in interviewing. That was a gain. But little else changed. Society continued to act as though the threat to our children was as great as it was understood to be when everybody believed in the Satanic take-over of our daycare centers and much of our society.

**Which brings us to the third part of the definition of scapegoating: its irrationality.** To be irrational is to refuse to alter one's opinions despite the fact that they are contradicted by both logic and evidence.

Do we have real evidence about the harmfulness of sexual contacts between children and adults? In fact we do. So lets take a look at the evidence.

The largest and one of the most rigorous studies of the effects of sexual activity between adults and minors was conducted by Baurmann in Germany in 1982. His conclusions about harm are as follows:

*Characteristics from the overall total also indicate that male victims are seldom harmed. None of the [male]victims in the follow up study reported harm.” (Baurmann p. 430) With girls the report of harm was significantly greater than for boys, but even in this case 47% of the victims reported no harm (Baurmann, p. 515). Some if not most of the difference between the two populations would seem to have it's explanation in the fact that girls were much more likely to experience violence in their sexual contacts. As Baurmann summarizes this, “Violent offences against male victims only constituted 0.6% of all reported sexual contacts. On the other hand, 13.5% of all sexual offences were violent acts against female victims.”<sup>16</sup>*

Additional studies show that the amount of damage created by intergenerational sexual contact has been grossly exaggerated in the media to which the general public has access. They also show that generally speaking there is little or no psychological damage to the child. When damage is in evidence it is usually a result of either a non-consensual contact, or societal overreaction.

Here are the conclusions of a study by Sonya Arreola, Torsten Neilands, Lance Pollack, Jay Paul, Joseph Catania that appeared in the Journal of Sex Research:

*Interestingly, the forced sex group [non-consensual sexual contact] and the no sex group were statistically indistinguishable in their level of well-being, while the consensu-*

*al sex group was significantly more likely to have a higher level of well-being than either of the other two groups. This suggests that consensual sex before 18 years of age may have a positive effect, perhaps as an adaptive milestone of adolescent sexual development.*<sup>17</sup>

Here is an important conclusion of an article by Curtis Dolezal and Alex Carball-Dieguez that appeared in the Journal Of Sex Research. August, 2002:

*Nevertheless, there is a substantial amount of sexual activity at a young age with older partners that is not perceived to be abusive by the men who experienced it. For this sample of men, a perception of abuse is associated with coercion and the age of the child.*<sup>18</sup>

Here is the conclusion of Larry L. Constantine, a prominent sex researcher, that was part of a paper presented at the conference, *Enfance et Sexualite*, University of Quebec at Montreal:1979.

*Put simply, the research literature shows there to be no in-built or inevitable outcome or set of emotional reactions to incest or to sexual encounters of children with adults. The more negative outcomes are associated with ignorance of sexuality; with negative attitudes toward sex; with tense situations; with force, coercion, or brutality; and with unsupportive, uncommunicative, or judgemental adult reactions.*<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of the findings of sexual research based on the statistical analysis of numerous studies was published in July 1999 in by Bruce Rind, Robert Bauserman, and Philip Tromovitch in the prestigious journal *Psychological Bulletin*.

A central conclusions of this report is as follows:

*CSA [Child sexual abuse] does not cause intense harm on a pervasive basis regardless of gender in the college population. The finding that college samples closely parallel national samples with regard to prevalence of CSA, types of experiences, self-perceived effects, and CSA-symptom*



*relations strengthens the conclusion that CSA is not a propertyed phenomenon and supports Constantine's (1981) conclusion that CSA has no inbuilt or inevitable outcome or set of emotional reactions.*<sup>20</sup>

It is noteworthy that this report was unanimously condemned by the Congress of the United States. The article had been peer-reviewed and published in one of the most prestigious psychological journals in existence. Later on it was reviewed again – this time by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), America's largest science organization. The AAAS found no fault with the methods or analyses in the report. Yet a group of congresspeople, most of whom, I am sure, never read the report, and few, if any, of whom had any expertise in social research, knew better than the American Association of the Advancement of Science.

Perhaps we would have to go back to Galileo's censure by the Catholic Church for his writings on heliocentrism to find such a preposterous example of a society taking absurd steps to protect its ignorance and to prevent open and intelligent discourse. Here we have the perfect example of how a society that is determined to persevere in its relentless persecution of a scapegoat deals with uncomfortable facts.

Adult heterosexual men, on rare occasions, forcibly rape, and even kill the women that attract them. But we do not conclude from this that most heterosexual activity between adults consists of rape and murder. Or that consensual activities between a man and a woman is the first step on a slippery slope that leads to the man becoming a serial killer. And we do not assume that a predisposition towards rape and murder defines the essential nature of all heterosexual men. At least most of us do not make this assumption.

Do we have data on what actually occurs in sexual relationships between men and boys, and how the younger partner experiences them? In fact we do.<sup>21</sup> In the late 70s and early 80s the legal situation in the Scandinavia countries was quite different than it is now, and the sex researcher Theo Sandfort was able to extensively interview 25

boys about their experience of their relationships with their adult sexual partners. His conclusions are instructive:

*The boys overwhelmingly experienced their sexual contact with the older partner as pleasant; such negative feelings as occurred had mainly to do with their social surroundings which they knew disapproved of such contacts. Bad behavior on the part of the older partner, such as misuse of his power advantage, almost never occurred, according to the boys: there seemed to be not so much a question of power abuse but of how the older partner used his power. The friendships and the sex which occurred within them had no negative influence upon the boy's general sense of well-being. The pedophile friendships were not based upon sex alone. The boys felt they received affection, love, attention, companionship, a sense of freedom and support from their older partners; they shared many activities.<sup>22</sup>*

Lets examine, in a bit more detail, what kinds of things happen in man-boy encounters by looking at three examples from other sources.

**The first example is from a collection of such incidents by R. Rivas:**

*I have been reading BoyChat for quite some time, and only just the other day I finally worked up the nerve to place a message. I'm still very confused and ashamed and afraid to even think about what I'm feeling, but to know that there are others... It helps.*

*This is my story. I've never told anyone, nor written of it until now.*

*When I was a boy I was what society would call molested. My parents were both drinkers, and they fought a lot. When they weren't fighting they were out partying, so from the age of 8 or so I was left to fend for myself. I had no siblings, and hardly any friends, so I learned to function alone out of necessity.*

*Behind my house was another family's property. They seemed sort of low-class: run down house, old cars in the yard, etc. As far as I know there were only three people in the family -- father, mother, and son. The son was named David, and I'm not sure how old he was exactly, but I guess he was a middle-to-older teenager, maybe 16-17 or so. I'm pretty sure he could drive, so I guess I've got the age about right.*

*David was kind of scruffy looking. He had some sort of after school job that was messy, maybe road work or construction or something. He was tall (at least to me, at 9) and lean, with blond hair in a crew cut. He was always nice to me, and since I was a lonely kid I guess I probably hung around him a lot just for the company.*

*Because of the limitations on graphic descriptions here on BoyChat, I won't supply the details. Its enough to say that David and I started a sexual relationship. He initiated it. It started with touching, etc., and eventually graduated to oral sex. He never penetrated me, and never made any attempt to. He never made me do anything I didn't want to do, in fact, he was reluctant for me to even try to perform oral sex on him because he thought he was too big and that he'd hurt me -- I insisted (it didn't work too well). This went on for over a year, pretty steadily. I felt like I had someone who wanted me, who thought I was special. I guess I loved him, as much as any 9 to 10 year old can.*

*Eventually my father found out about what was going on. To this day, 15 years later, I don't know how he knew. Something went down between my Dad and these people. I never saw David again, and their house was empty. I got the worst beating of my life, and nearly had my arm broken, at my father's hands. He said it was to teach me to be a man. Then I was subjected to counselling.*

*I was told that what had happened was wrong. But, if that were true, then I was just as much or more to blame. Al-*

*though David was the initiator, it was I who sought him out more often than not. It was I who suggested new games, new "moves," to try. It was I who, time and time again, offered my thin, naked boy's body up to him for pleasure and for love. I willingly gave myself to him. There was no coercion.*

*And now? It's 15 years later, and my life is a mess. I've never been really able to commit or complete anything. I've never really had a serious relationship, just a few fleeting sexual encounters. Although I'm told differently, I don't feel attractive to anybody. I don't feel wanted or loved. I am completely alone in the world, without a friend to turn to. And why? Well, lots of reasons, probably. But largely, I blame it on being ripped away from the bosom of the only person who ever showed me affection. As far as I am concerned, all that lies ahead is cold and misery, until I finally get to die.*

*God, David, I miss you.<sup>23</sup>*

**The second example is from a biography about the psychotherapist, Heinz Kohut:**

*Heinz Kohut, the founder of "Self Psychology" and one of the most important psychological theorists of the 20th Century reported that "I had this private tutor, who was a very important person in my life. He would take me to museums and swimming and concerts and we had endless intellectual conversations and played complicated intellectual games and played chess together." They also did sexual things together, which they both enjoyed, but Kohut felt the sex was more or less incidental. The important thing for him was the relationship. He said "I was an only child. So it was in some way psychologically life-saving for me. I was very fond of this fellow." Heinz was about 10 or 11 at the time. He describes his years with his tutor as being perhaps the happiest ones in his life.<sup>24</sup>*

**The third example is a letter written by a 14 year old boy:**

*I am a 14-year-old boy involved sexually with an older guy I happen to love very much. I am sick and tired of listening to all the stories of boy lovers and how perverted and sick they are. Well, if it wasn't for my older friend Mark, I would probably be dead by now.*

*When I was 11 years old my parents started to drink real heavy, and instead of buying food they bought a lot of booze. They were fighting all the time, and my dad always hit me for not cleaning the house. One night I was looking at this horror movie on television and I got scared, so I went over to where he was sitting and said, "dad, can I sit with you?" Well, he called me a little faggot and then took the belt to me. He hit me extra hard that night because the belt buckle hit me in the lip and I had to have eight stitches. (He told the hospital doctor that I was in a fight with another kid.)*

*When I turned 12, things really got pretty bad, because my mother took my little sister and ran away. I was now all alone at home with my dad. He got fired from his truck driving job for drinking, and took out all his hatred on me. One night I stayed at the local library a little later finishing my homework. When I got home my dad was drunk and punched me in the face and threw me out of the house. I guess a neighbor called the police because they came and locked me out and took me to a children's shelter.*

*I was only there for a short time, because it was there when I met Mark, who was my youth caseworker. He was always so nice and gentle with me. For the first time I was being treated like a human being. Mark asked me if I would like to spend the Christmas holidays with him, and I jumped at the opportunity. All during that period, Mark treated me like his son, taking me to the movies, ice-skating, football games, and watching television together. The last night together was very sad because Mark explained I*

*was going to be moved to a special school for boys who didn't have parents or relatives.*

*Well, Mark hugged me that night and I could tell he was crying too. I told him that night I loved him and wanted to remain with him forever.*

*I had to go back to the shelter for a few weeks later I had to go to this big courtroom, and I saw Mark sitting there smiling. The judge asked me if I would like to live with Mark for good. I was so happy I cried.*

*Well, I was now 13 years old and like most other guys was jerking off every chance I could. Mark surprised me one night and walked into my room while I had my penis in my hand. I was scared he would send me back to the shelter, but instead he smiled and sat down on the bed and talked to me. That night he took me in his arms and gently masturbated me... . He held me tight afterwards and it was the most thrilling experience of my entire life.*

*I know Mark is a boy lover, but I also know he loves me like a son. I am now 14, and I have a girlfriend, and Mark is very excited for me. He gives me spending money to take my girlfriend ice-skating and to the movies.*

*Well, Mark gets these bulletins from NAMNLA and he is a member. I often look at these and other boy love material, and I get sick when I read about how some people treat guys who love boys.*

*Without guys like Mark, I would probably be dead today because without someone to love me – well, life wouldn't be worth living. I'm the luckiest and happiest kid today because of boy lovers like Mark.*

*No one told me to write this letter, and everything I wrote is the complete truth. Maybe others can learn from my experience that boy lovers are indeed the real men of our society. Thank you for reading this, and you can print it, if you like.*

Would these beloved boys have been well-served had their lovers been discovered and sentenced to 50 years or more in prison, as is presently the custom in the United States? Life imprisonment for sex play? Should we murder the older partner in these love relationships for bringing forbidden joy into the child's life and for providing unauthorized life-saving events to a lonely boy? Is that logical? Only if we care about maintaining our own irrational and unexamined prejudices more than we care about the well-being of the children. Clearly what the court systems in the U.S. is doing to "sex offenders" is based neither on the data nor on logic but on the irrational hysteria of people in a society that is in the throes of a moral panic. It is, in other words, a classic example of the sort of thinking that takes place in scapegoating.

We would do well to give careful consideration to the conclusion Baumann presented in his monumental study:

*In cases involving non-violent, consensual, yet punishable, only a small portion of affected victims would be protected from some kind of abstract harm. Many of the persons who were declared to be victims in this way were initially harmed by the existence of the particular laws themselves. Thus, one fifth of all traumatized victims in this study – including victims of violence – felt they were seriously harmed by the behavior of parents, other relatives, teachers, and persons involved in criminal prosecution proceedings. By contrast, it was observed that in one case group, primary harm occurred only in exceptional cases (exhibitionism); and in another (non-violent, consensual sexual contacts between children and older person), it was rare. When, within a given group of criminal acts, the probability of individual harm to the declared victim is very small, and at the same time, it is clear that the existence of the law can cause secondary harm in both the criminal proceedings process area as well as informal spheres, a kind of social "cost-benefit" analysis should then be performed. When the mere exist-*

*ence of a law causes a great deal of harm, and only rarely serves a protective function, its advantages and disadvantages should be conscientiously and responsibly weighed against one another, taking all of the consequences into account. Such an assessment one should above all, make use of more scientific methods, and rely less on speculation and ideology.<sup>26</sup>*

But will the carefully formulated conclusions presented by scholarly and careful researchers be read by decision-makers? For the most part they will not be. They will not be read because those who are deeply invested in scapegoating the people they perceive as demons, believe they already know, and that any information that brings into question their beliefs must, a-priori, be false. They believe, as did certain medieval scholars, that they can know how many teeth are in the horse's mouth without looking. And this is precisely how scapegoating people defend themselves against knowing what they are doing.

**The fourth indication that we are dealing with scapegoating has to do with the demonization of the scapegoat.** Perhaps this issue demonization has been better described by David Sonenschein than by anybody else. In his book *Pedophiles on Parade*, Sonenschein points out that to force a person to name himself as a pedophile is “a very powerful form of stigmatizing.” It is, he says “a confession, an admittance of guilt, and an acceptance of inferiority under the dominance of power, all accomplished within the efficient economy of a single name.” The example of this confession being forced on a person given by Sonenscherin is from a novel by Andrew Vachss:

*“ Didn't they tell you what you were when you had all that therapy?”*

*His right hand squeezed his left wrist, hard. Muscles twitched along his forearm. "What I was. "*

*"Say it. "*

*His eyes were soft, brooding brown, muddy around the rim where they lead into the white, hard in the tiny circles around the pupils. "A pedophile, that's what they said."<sup>27</sup>*



Similar requirements for self degrading confessions are a regular part of the “cognitive/behavioral” treatment programs that convicted sex offenders are currently required to attend.

Sonenschein goes on to point out that the already stigmatized "pedophile" is frequently subjected to a great deal of other name-calling as well. "Marric's [J.J. Maric, another popular novelist] rapist is a 'beast' and a 'swine'. "Dorner's [Margorie Dormer] kidnapper is a 'Creep,' a 'scuzz,' and is 'crazy is loon'. "As usual, Vachss leads the way in extensiveness and intensity. His hero refers to molesters as 'freaks,' 'losers,' 'dregs,' 'maggots,' 'creeps,' 'dirtbags,' 'scumbags,' 'vermin, and 'chumps'. ”<sup>28</sup>

In the letter section following any on-line article about a pedophile one encounters a huge amount of this kind of name-calling. Verbal abuse of this type would not be considered acceptable for any other minority group in our society. There can be no doubt that our society is intent on demonizing the “pedophile,” whatever that term means to the person using it.

**The casting out of the scapegoat is the fifth aspect of our definition.** The most obvious example of casting out is the incredibly draconian prison sentences that are now handed out men who have engaged only in mutually desired activities, or who have done no more than download some pictures depicting illegal sexual activities. It could be argued that in neither of these case there is an actual victim.<sup>29</sup> No one is harmed unless it is by the reaction of society. Yet men found guilty of these “crimes” receive what amounts to life sentences. They would not receive a worse punishment had they actually raped and murdered a small child.

But the casting out does not end there. A certain number of those who have received long sentences are then subjected to incarceration through “civil commitment” when their prison sentences are done. No other group of prisoners is subjected to this obviously unconstitutional procedure.

Then, if the sex offender is finally released into the community, he is placed on the electronic pillory called “the registry.” By keeping the offender's face forever in front of the pubic it is assured that he will

have great difficulty finding a job or a place to live. And should he, by good fortune, perseverance and force of will, manage to earn a living and rent a room, it will still be impossible for him to re-integrate into the community in anything resembling a normal manner. He has been cast out into the desert, and is socially, if not physically, dead.

## ***Uprooting the Weed***

Is there any hope for uprooting this weed that crowds out so many good things that could be happening between us? What is the cure for scapegoating? As we think about strategies for reducing the amount of scapegoating that takes place in the world, it is important to begin with the understanding that the one doing the scapegoating is also not a monster. We must not allow ourselves to demonize the scapegoater. He or she genuinely wants to do what is good and is no more a monster than is the scapegoated person. The novel *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink<sup>30</sup> brought this point home to me more vividly than anything else I have read. Hanna, one of the two main characters in the novel, worked in a concentration camp at one point in her life, and is guilty of a terrible crime. Neither the profound evil of the concentration camp, nor the enormity of Hanna's specific crime is minimized. Yet she is a very human and understandable person, and capable of real love.

There is a Gary Larson cartoon sequence in which a mob is confronting the sheriff at the jail. They want to lynch the man inside. The Sheriff holds them off for them for a while, but then gives in. "Well, all right," he says. "But this is the last time." Many people would agree that it is not a good idea to demonize people. Yet perhaps we all cling to that one exception – the one person or group who in our minds we would willingly allow to be lynched. This may be our biggest stumbling block. Perhaps the scapegoaters are right on at least this one point: in order to struggle against the enemy in this case the practice of scapegoating – in an effective manner we must begin by cleansing our inner household.

The demonization of human beings is the linchpin of all scapegoating processes. Therefore we must attack the process of demonization

wherever it is found. Whatever group or person it is who is being demonized, they are human beings. This is true whether or not they have objectively speaking done things that are actually harmful. The scapegoated people are more like us than they are different from us. They are understandable even if we do not agree with them. This is the message we must get out. Perhaps the most effective manner of countering the demonization of people is to make their stories available. Those being scapegoated must be permitted to tell their own stories in their own way. If they do so honestly, and if their accounts are read with an open mind, they will be recognized as human. The stories of past scapegoating scandals are always popular, but every society resists publishing the stories of its current scapegoats in a realistic manner.

In every situation where it is possible, the dynamics of scapegoating must be uncovered and revealed for what they are. In this way we work to usher in the day when we are able to extricate ourselves from this quagmire – when we will stop demonizing one another, when we will seek to understand rather than judge and condemn, and when we will listen to one another's stories with respect. Then we will begin to realize that we have everything to learn from one another.

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## Chapter Five

### Is It Wise to Desire What We Most Want?

#### Reflections on Original Sin

*"Desire came upon the One in the beginning."*

*Rig Veda*

#### **Introduction**

When we look at the photos from Abu Graib, we are overwhelmed with the realization that something has gone wrong with our country. This is not, we tell ourselves, how Americans are. Yet the “few bad apples” theory crumbles almost as soon as it is expressed. The events in Abu Graib were obviously supported from on high. Had we studied history more carefully from the perspective of the losers and the oppressed, as Howard Zinn suggests in *A People’s History of the United States*, we would have reacted to the events with horror and disgust, but not with much surprise.

Once we are forced to acknowledge that the events at Abu Graib were the logical outcome of the American character, our second line of defense against this shock to our national identity is to point toward the atrocities that were carried out in Iraq under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Indeed, he was a ruthless and cruel despot. But was Abu Graib a deeper hell under Saddam than under Bush? The question is pointless. The only comfort we can draw from the comparison is that something is wrong with the Arab world also.

If we expand our perspective a bit more, and take a hard look at the history of the world, we are forced to admit that something seems to have gone dreadfully wrong with civilization itself. Whether we live in Tokyo, New York, Moscow, Khartoum, Paris, Kampala or Peking, if we wish to instill pride in the citizens of our countries, we will have to sweep a lot of outrageous cruelty and stupidity under under the rug of our carefully edited history books and newspapers. Something has indeed gone wrong.

Perhaps there were pre-industrialized societies that did better. The civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas, however, suggest to us that when the New World was discovered, it was well on its way down the same path of exploitation, genocide and empire that defined history in the Old World. Perhaps, on the basis of what we hear of the Fore in New Guinea or the Native Americans that Columbus first found and enslaved, we can still entertain the notion that we are not just killer apes with opposable thumbs, big brains, and a knack for language. Perhaps some essential goodness resides in the heart of humanity, but clearly something has gone wrong.

In this chapter I will be making two related points. First, I will argue that a wrongness has entered into humanity that has caused us to become alienated from our essential nature. I will suggest that this wrongness can be identified, and that it pertains to the notion that any one group of human beings is entitled to a disproportionate share of the world's goods. This notion of entitlement is identified as the "original sin" that has separated humanity from its essential wholesomeness. The second point pertains to the way this life-distorting entitlement that pervades human life and politics is maintained. Here I address the question of why humanity has had so much difficulty liberating itself from an oppressive idea that is clearly not in its interest. This will lead us into an effort to understand the nature of Eros, and to the issue of the repression of childhood sexuality.

Each of the two issues I will be addressing – original sin and the repression of Eros – is large and complex. This being so, there might be some advantage in treating them in separate essays, and I gave some thought to that possibility. However, the central point that I am making here has to do with the relationship between these two human realities, so I decided to keep them both in one essay even though that may place extra demands on the attention of the reader.

## ***Original Sin***

By original sin, I refer to the idea that a wrongness has entered into a creation that is fundamentally good. There are two quite distinct myths of creation provided in the early chapters of Genesis: Genesis



1:1 – 2:4, and Genesis 2:4 – 3:24. It is obviously counter-productive to take either of these stories as a literal account of creation. Among other problems, on a literal level the two accounts contradict each other. But when we read them as myths and dreams should be read – as statements about the meaning of external, perceptible events – these stories are profound and important.

The first creation story affirms the essential goodness of creation. If the validity of this judgment is accepted, we find little support for spiritual paths that negate the significance of the world around us, or for techniques for escaping from it. The second story suggests to us that, although creation is good, something has gone wrong. The notion of original sin is about a wrongness that has entered into a good creation.

I find the second story to be somewhat enigmatic as to the exact nature of this wrongness that has entered into creation. But if we jump to Paul in the New Testament we get at least a partial clarification, or development, of the Genesis theme. When, in *Romans*, Paul talks about how we all fell in Adam but are raised in Christ. He is clearly dealing with corporate images of humanity. Adam is the old form of humanity. Christ is the new form. The concept of original sin, then, speaks about our corporate or social nature. It is not, first and foremost, a theory about individuals.

## ***Corporate humanity***

In order to understand Paul's idea's about Adam and Christ, especially as he develops them in his *Epistle to the Romans*, we will have to take a slight digression and explore this concept of "corporate humanity." Most of us are familiar with one formulation of this concept. The business corporation is a "legal person" composed of many individuals. The term, "corporate" comes from the Latin "corporare – to make into a body" The metaphor, then, is that of people being the individual cells of a single body that is more the the sum of its parts. The legal corporation has a life that transcends the individuals that compose it and that survives their deaths.

In biblical criticism, a very similar notion of “corporate humanity” surfaces. We see this theme explicated by the biblical scholar, Gerald L. Finnman in his essay *The Corporate Solidarity of the Human Race and Christ as the Second Adam*. He points out that “the term Adam is used four ways in Scripture. First of all, it is the original man’s name. Second, both the first man and his wife, Eve, are called Adam. Third, mankind is identified as Adam. And fourth, Christ is designated as the “last Adam” (Genesis 2:18,19; 1:26, 27; 5:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 15:45). Well over five hundred times the term “Adam” is used to designate more than an individual. In most instances it refers to the entire race, hence, it is a corporate solidarity term. It denotes the condition of oneness resulting from an identity of nature among the members of the human race.”<sup>1</sup> Both Adam and Christ are identified here with the human race as a whole, with “corporate humanity” in the theological sense. At one level, the idea here would be that just as a cell in the human body can act on its own behalf, it can also act on behalf of the whole body, so we as individuals sometimes act on our own behalf and at other times on the behalf of humanity as a whole. On a deeper level the idea suggests the mystical equivalence of the one and the many – of Atman and Brahman in the Hindu terminology – of the individual and all of humanity in the biblical sense as in Paul’s thought and in the mystical sections of the gospel of John. “That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me , and I in thee, that they also may be one in us...” (John 17:23).

It could be argued that in all of life one finds this dialectic between the whole and its parts. A slime mold, for example, exists for most of its life as a collection of independent one-celled organisms. At certain times, however, these individual organisms pull themselves together into what appears and acts like a single organism, with differentiated parts and functions. While the dialectic is illustrated dramatically with slime molds, the basic pattern we see here is inherent in all of creation. On the human level this is reflected in the fact that we all live simultaneously in our individual mode and our corporate mode.

Understood as speculation about the relationship between our individual and collective modes of existing, Paul’s letter to the Romans provides us important clues with regard to where we must look if we are

to understand the absurd and unnecessary forms of suffering that human beings inflict upon themselves, upon one other and upon the world in general. It is not to be found in the essential structures of existence. Creation, in its essence, is good. We need to look for an unnecessary form of wrongness created by human choice. And we must look for this wrongness not primarily within individuals, though it is surely reflected there, but first and foremost within our collective or corporate nature.

This emphasis on the corporate nature of sin fits with the observation made in the first chapter of this volume, “The Collective Face of Evil”: namely that the great atrocities perpetrated by human beings are those committed by communities – most frequently by nations – not by individuals. If one wishes further substantiation of this last observation, one need look no further than the history of genocide in the 20th century – the Armenians in Turkey, the Holocaust, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Russia under Stalin, and East Timor to cite some of the outstanding examples. If we add to genocide the history of colonialism and economic exploitation, and the modern practice of war with its annihilation of whole cities of people as in Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the case is made many times over. Sin is first and foremost a social fact. It has to do with how we organize our lives together, and with what we do as collectives.

Cognitive therapy and research has taught us a simple lesson. We act as we do because we think as we do. Our behavior is the logical outcome of the way we understand who we are in relation to the world around us. This is true of collectives just as it is true of individuals. What we are looking for, then, is the collective action that is the ongoing source of pointless suffering, and the idea or world view that justifies this kind of action.

### ***Inequity as "Original Sin"***

Once we realize that we are looking at social facts first, and only secondarily at individual facts, it seems to me that there is a relatively simple method for identifying the best candidate for original sin. We need only observe a variety historical situations in which people have

been unspeakably cruel to other human beings (they are easy to find), and ask ourselves, what do these situations have in common? What one always finds, I would submit, is a group struggling to create or maintain a system that grants them a hugely disproportionate share of the world's goods, services, and decision making authority.

As a thought experiment I would suggest trying to identify even a single case in which a significant collective atrocity was committed in which the effort to create or maintain a the fundamental inequity was not the more or less obvious mainspring of the action. As we examine specific situations, we generally see two kinds of violence – the violence of those who are trying to create or maintain the inequity, and the violence of those who are trying to overcome this inequity. Neither form of violence is especially pretty. My own conviction is that we should and can find non-violent means of changing social structures. Still, it should be emphasized that those who affirm the validity of the inequity are those who create the primary cause of violence and suffering. Without the creation of privilege there would be nothing for the dispossessed to react to. In fact, there would be no dispossessed.

A dysfunctional way of behaving always has it's source in a dysfunctional way of seeing reality. If creating, and attempting to maintain, extreme forms of inequity are at the root of the unnecessary suffering that people perpetrate upon one another, we must ask ourselves what relevant mental construct lies behind this behavior. The notion of class entitlement suggests itself. By class entitlement I refer to the belief that one race, class, sex, age, country, religion, caste or group is entitled to a hugely disproportionate amount of the world's goods, services and decision-making authority. It is in this demonic notion that we find humanity's original sin. Class entitlement is the idea that distorts the shape of humanity. It is the fall.

It is possible to make a case that one person should receive a larger proportion of the world's goods and services for one of four reasons. One person may (1) make a larger effort, (2) take greater risks, (3) make a larger contribution, or (4) have greater needs than another. Within limits any of these reasons might be valid. The first three reasons listed have to do with the issue of incentive. We want to provide people with incentives to work hard, take calculated risks, and make a

contribution to the social good. A system of economic distribution might provide one person with the opportunity to earn three or four times as much as another on the basis of greater efforts, risks, or contributions, and one could still argue that such a system was equitable.

In reality, however, we are talking about one person consuming a hundred, a thousand, or a million times as much as another person. On this scale the argument for entitlement become ridiculous and the outcome grotesque. A system that permits one person to park his huge, privately owned yacht at the edge of a river where homeless people are sleeping under a bridge nearby is not a rational, equitable or sustainable arrangement. The rich do not work thousands of times harder than the poor, nor do they make thousands of times the contribution to society, not take risks that are thousands of times more frightening. They do not have needs that are thousands of times more pressing. In fact, the rich consume a share of the world's resources that would bankrupt the earth's ecology almost immediately were too many to consume at that rate, and many of these voracious consumers make no contribution to society at all.

### ***Polymorphous Undifferentiated Sex***

In order to understand how original sin is embedded in the social structure and is passed down from generation to generation we must examine the vicissitudes of Eros in the development of individuals.

Freud believed that adult, genitally focused sexuality grows out of a more generalized infantile sexuality that was, to use his term, "polymorphous perverse." The infant naturally seeks bodily pleasure in a variety of ways (hence the term "polymorphous" – many forms). The adult's genitally focused sexual activity can be understood as a specialization of an eroticism that originally involved many possible activities and, virtually, the whole body. As Norman O. Brown says, "the organ in question may be the genital, or it may be the mouth, as in thumb sucking, or it may be the eyes, as in the delight of seeing."<sup>2</sup> It is "many-formed."

Brown goes on to suggest that "if normal adult sexuality is a pattern which has grown out of the infantile delight in the pleasurable activity

of all parts of the human body, then what was originally a much wider capacity for pleasure in the body has been narrowed in range, concentrated on one particular (the genital) organ.”<sup>3</sup> The “normal” adult pattern of exclusive genital heterosexual sex is not, as we are prone to think, the only natural form of sexual experience. It derives from the imposition of a cultural template that is rigidly enforced, and, as such, it represents a form of what Brown calls a “tyranny.” It is a “tyranny of one component in infantile sexuality, a tyranny which suppresses some of the other components altogether and subordinates the rest to itself.”<sup>4</sup>

I would take Brown’s analysis a step further. Sex, in its broadest sense, is not only about bodily pleasure, but also about relationship. It is the desire for a pleasurable, somatically grounded relationship with a beloved other. But as the infant grows into adulthood, he or she finds that not only are the forms of acceptable bodily pleasure prescribed by a cultural template, but the kind of relationships that are permissible is also rigidly defined. One can have only certain kinds of relationships with designated categories of persons, and within these relationships one can do only certain prescribed things. This is, indeed, a kind of tyranny.

With infants we see that sex is social from birth.<sup>5</sup> The first thing an infant wants after undergoing its expulsion from the mother’s womb is to find oneness again with another person through the mouth and breast. It is this seeking of oneness with the other through the medium of bodily contact and pleasure that I would call Eros.

## **Eros**

We act because we want something. This simple and self-evident fact is sometimes obscured by the modern intellectual commitment to deny that purposefulness is an irreducible fact of life. The great modern project has been to reduce all of reality to thing-like entities that are driven only by mechanistic forms of causality. Thing-like entities are subject to manipulation and control. This mechanistic, reductionist and manipulative perspective seems fairly plausible, and even useful, when we examine entities other than ourselves. But when I turn my

consciousness back on myself I do not discover a thing, but a complex structure of experience. It is, furthermore, a structure of experience that does not wish to be manipulated and controlled from the outside. At the center of this complex experiential structure we find levels of desire.

All biological systems function in accordance with certain behavioral invariants. This is true of entities that do not have brains or even nervous systems; indeed, it is true of entities that consist of only one cell. All living organisms seek food, respond to stimuli, engage in goal-directed action, attempt to preserve themselves from life threatening situations, defend semipermeable boundaries, resist excessive control from the outside, digest, excrete, replicate, and enter into symbiotic relationships with other entities.

In terms of these behavioral invariants, other entities appear externally very similar to me. It would therefore seem to be an unjustified intellectual assumption to think that they are devoid of the kind of inner experience that I know in myself. Rather, it is only reasonable to assume that they are driven by desires just as I am. This reluctance to attribute inner experience to other entities is not only intellectually unjustified, but it is psychologically and socially dangerous, as well, in that it isolates me from, and puts me in conflict with, all other forms of life – human or otherwise.

The only reasonable assumption is that for all entities, action, and life itself, is driven by desire. If we wish to understand any living entity, our understanding of the mechanics of his/her parts must be complemented by an appreciation of the desires of the whole. For this reason, it seems to me that eventually science must complete itself by developing a binocular vision; reality must come to be understood teleologically as well as mechanistically.

When we examine the structure of desire that we are, and as we hear others report about their experience, we discover something similar to Maslow's "hierarchy of needs." I would use the term "hierarchy of wants" to emphasize its experiential aspect. First of all we want food, shelter, warmth and protection from dangers. When our wants on this level are minimally provided for, we encounter a second level of de-

sire. We find that we want certain kinds of relationships with others. We want, to put it simply, to love and to be loved. This need for loving and being loved transcends utilitarian concerns. We may, of course, reach out to others as sources of food, shelter or safety. But, beyond this, we desire the experience of loving and being loved by others as an intrinsically valued state of being.

At the very heart of the history of the psychoanalytic movement, one finds a succession of related but, in part, conflicting theories of human desire. The central preoccupation of this movement has always been to define what people most want, and to examine what happens when these wants come up against the recalcitrant facts of external reality.

Thinkers in every culture have speculated about the nature of human desire and its dynamics. Perhaps the most fundamental spiritual, psychological and ethical question that can be asked is this: how can I manage my own desires and influence the desires of others in such a way as to achieve the greatest degree of happiness for everybody? This was clearly a central question in Eastern speculation – in Hinduism, and even more centrally in Buddhism. As soon as we find the Greeks philosophizing about the ultimate issues we find them also asking this question. The term the Greeks used for the kind of desire that I am concerned with here is “Eros.” It is this term that I will be using in this essay. To be captured by Eros is to be “in love.”

For years I have been concerned with the issue of Eros, and have tried to define what I mean by this term. In an essay I published entitled “Eros and Wholeness,”<sup>6</sup> I defined Eros simply as “the desire for wholeness.” The basic idea here was taken from Plato’s Symposium.

In an essay entitled “The Phallic Child: Its Emergence and Meaning in a Clinical Setting,”<sup>7</sup> I defined Eros as “the desire for attachments that facilitate the survival and development of the self,” or more simply as “the desire for self-completing human relationships.”

In a third essay dealing with this topic, “Interpreting the Satanic Legend,”<sup>8</sup> I defined Eros as “the full range of intense love feelings between people.” While my thinking about Eros has shifted and developed over the years, these various definitions are not basically contradictory. They all define Eros, from an experiential point of view, as a



form of desire. The desire may have a physiological ground, but its meaning is found in the social context. In order to highlight the social aspect of Eros, we need to add still another definition: “Eros is the desire for union with the beloved.” Since Eros is a form of desire, when we try to seek out its essence, we must ask ourselves “what do we most want?” I think it can be said that, once the basic needs for food and adequate shelter have been met, what we most want is loving relationships – relationships that provide us with affirmation, pleasure, meaning, self transcendent goals, the possibility for growth, and, ultimately, wholeness. It is very hard to give an adequate definition of Eros in one sentence. Let us review the definitions given thus far:

Eros is the desire for wholeness. Eros is the desire for attachments that facilitate the survival and development of the self. Eros refers to the full range of intense love feelings between people. Eros is the desire for union with the beloved.

I could, perhaps, come up with a single definition that would unify all those given above. I am inclined, however, to allow these four definitions to stand as they are. Like the various facets of a diamond, each of the overlapping definitions highlights a different aspect of Eros. Together they represent my best effort to date for defining the meaning of that form of desire – that love-energy – we call “Eros.”

### ***The Repression of Eros***

Freud’s view was that civilization is dependent upon the repression of Eros. As he saw it, the energies that fuel civilization are the results of sexual desires that have been painfully blocked, and re-directed through sublimation into socially useful activities. To give up desiring what we most want is the price that must be exacted from every citizen if we are to have any real civilization at all. Behind Freud’s view of sublimation lies a profoundly pessimistic view of life. Once the needs for food, shelter, and safety are even minimally met, what we most want becomes defined by Eros. If Freud is right, to say that the requirements of civilized life demand that we make significant sacrifices understates the case. Once we give up what we most want, what

is there left? Surely, surrendering our natural Eros must have a profoundly distorting and debilitating effect on the human psyche.

I recall many instances in my childhood that pertain to the repression of sexuality, but two stand out. I recall that when I finished taking a bath I liked to run around the house naked. My mother found this disturbing and, after I refused to respond to her verbal insistence that I get some clothes on she took a yardstick to me. I must have been about four or five at the time. On a second occasion I must have been two or three years older – probably about seven. I recall that we had guests, and that a girl from their family who was a couple of years younger was allowed to take a bath with my younger brother. I was quite jealous and wanted to get into the act. I went into the bathroom where they were bathing, and urinated in the commode. I wanted to see this girl, and wanted her to see me. When I was discovered in my indiscretion, I was surprised at the vehemence of the outrage expressed by my mother and the other adults. I protested that they allowed the other two to bathe together, but was told that I was too old for such things. These are trivial events in a way. I would assume that almost everybody has experienced comparable events in his or her past. But, trivial as they are, it is through events of this kind we that learn that spontaneous expressions of erotic curiosity and exuberance are prohibited, and result in severe punishment, and possibly rejection, if discovered.

If Eros represents what we most want in the sphere of human relationships, then what could be powerful enough to cause us to repress it? A part of the answer is found in the yardstick. Children are punished for spontaneous expressions of Eros. But punishment by itself is by no means the whole story. As a forest fire might be fought with another fire, or as wild elephants are tamed by being squeezed between tame elephants, Eros is defeated by Eros. The most powerful erotic need of the child is for oneness with his parents and with other key adults in his or her life. In a variety of ways the message is given to the child that if s/he wants to belong in the larger group, then s/he must renounce all but the socially prescribed expressions of Eros. Various punishments may be used to aid in the process of repression, but the most profound attack on unruly erotic impulses is the threat of rejec-

tion by the group – a fate that is literally worse than death. The prohibiting adults becomes internalized in the form of what Freud called the “superego,” or, perhaps more aptly, the “sadistic superego.” The sadistic (prohibiting and punishing) superego becomes a part of the personality. In this way repression is internalized.

In my description of the dynamics of repression I have presented the Freudian view in a somewhat generalized manner. Freud talked about the “Oedipus Complex” in his description of these dynamics and gave a great deal of emphasis to the family triangle. I feel that a more generalized description of the pattern allows us to see that the internalization of repression is essentially the same for girls as it is for boys, and that it operates, with variations, and with various degrees of severity, in most cultures.

One of the curious facts in our culture is that, as we have moved toward more liberation with regard to adult sexuality, we have become more repressive than ever with regard to childhood sexuality. Our current moral panic about “child sexual abuse” is really a panic about letting our children know what they want and acting on that knowledge. Why else should the absurd notion of the “innocence” (read “asexuality”) of children be clung to so passionately and tenaciously? Children are emphatically not permitted to decide for themselves what they want with regard to sexual expression. If possible, they are not even to know what they want.

When one realizes that for many purposes “child” means anyone under eighteen (!?) one must concede that our sexual revolution is no revolution at all. To be raised under a harsh and rigid repression, and then to be suddenly released into an ambivalent sort of liberation at eighteen, can produce only profoundly distorted and unsatisfactory results. By then, the capacity for spontaneous expression has long since been destroyed. The ability to know one’s own desires, or to own them should they become known, is atrophied. And perhaps most importantly, the ability to experience biological sex as the desire for union with the other has been weakened if not lost entirely.

## ***The Outcome of the Repression of What We Most Want***

I feel the need to give credit for the sources of some of my thinking and vocabulary, but do not want to become bogged down in the historical and academic tasks of tracing exactly where these ideas came from, and who used what terms first. In passing, therefore, let me just say that I have probably been influenced more by Harry Guntrip's book, *Schizoid Phenomena, Objects Relations and the Self*,<sup>9</sup> than by any other single piece of writing. Some of my vocabulary I will borrow from his mentors, Winnicott and Fairbairn. But the use I am making of this thought is my own. I am not sure that Guntrip would have agreed with everything I have to say – especially with my insistence that sexuality contains within itself the desire for bonded, loving and fulfilling relationships with the other. All this noted in passing, I will continue with my narration without giving much attention to historical sources.

A brief digression about the role of internalizing other people and our relationships with them with regard to the development and structure of the psyche may help us understand how we internalize our oppression. Lynn Margulus<sup>10</sup> demonstrated to the satisfaction of most biologists that the mitochondria and the chloroplasts that form essential parts of the eukaryotic cell – the cell that is the building block for all multicellular life – were originally separate organisms that a larger cell attempted to ingest. Apparently the smaller cell (a bacterium) refused to be digested and entered into a symbiotic relationship with the cell that tried to eat it. The cells that make up our bodies were formed by the internalization or the introjection of other cells. I will use the term “introjection” to refer to the process by which a physical or psychic system develops its structure by internalizing another entity. The term “introject” is most commonly used as a verb, but I will also use it as a noun, as referring to that which is introjected. The psychological importance of this process was perhaps first noted by Freud in his seminal essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*, where he described taking the lost object into oneself as the central aspect of the grief process.

In a manner similar to the way simpler cells became the more complex eukaryotic cells through introjecting other cells, every infant be-

comes a self through the introjection of the significant others it encounters in its environment. Interestingly, the first introjection is associated with eating – just as it was with regard to the development of the eukaryotic cell. This first significant introject is, of course, the mother, and the process of introjection occurs at the breast. Throughout life we take others into ourselves, and each time we do we modify who we are. The processes can be complex, and different theorists vary somewhat in the way they describe it. Most would say that what is introjected is the “image” of the other. Some would emphasize that the whole relationship with the other is internalized. Object relations theory is the school of thought that is most compatible with my own thinking. The object relations perspective views psychic structure as being wholly, or in large part, the outcome of the internalization of our relationships. As Frank Summers puts it, “psychoanalytic work within the object relations paradigm is based on a group of theories that, although differing considerably, have as their underlying commonality the view of development and pathology as products of the internalization of early interpersonal relationships.”<sup>11</sup> We are, as they say, what we eat.

The most dramatic consequence of the repression of childhood sexuality is a four-way, or in some cases a five-way partition of the self. The oppressive and attacking significant other from the outside, who insists on the original repression, is internalized in a figure that becomes, to use Freud's term, the sadistic superego. The sadistic super-ego relentlessly attacks all expressions of childhood sexuality as soon as the child is weaned from the breast.

The second figure is the compliant self. This is the aspect of the personality that seeks to create and preserve a bonded relationship with the person doing the repression, and as time goes on, with other people in positions of authority upon whom the figure of the sadistic super ego is projected. In order to secure this approval the compliant self will suppress, attack, deny and degrade its own sexuality. I will borrow Fairbain's term “the false self” to designate this aspect of the personality.

Beneath the false self, one finds the conflicted relationship one had with the original repressive figures. This is the sadomasochistic level

of the self. This level of the personality is full of ambivalence, hatred, rage and a somewhat tortured and never quite fulfilled need for love.

This leaves the true self – the self that is grounded in what the person actually and spontaneously desires in his or her inner-most being. The true self could also be called the “erotic self,” by which I mean roughly the same thing that Guntrip talks about as the “libidinal self”. This true self however, at least in adults, is not easy to find. What one first finds of the true self after breaking through various defensive layers, is a traumatized and fearful self who is often furtive, mute and self-hating.

If the person is fortunate to have encountered a benign parenting figure at some point in his or her life – a figure that affirms one’s erotic essential self – one may also have a fifth aspect of his or her personality – which, though it may seem like a contradiction in terms, I would like to call the erotic super-ego. This would be a figure that encouraged an adaptation to the demands of external reality and to the needs of others, that is not born of repression and self-hatred, but of self affirmation and the love of others. But it would also encourage any non-harming and life enhancing expressions of love that emerged from the libidinal self.

The sadistic super-ego, the false self, the sadomasochistic self, the true self, and sometimes the erotic super-ego, are the central figures of the drama that we all enact in the process of growing up. Biographies are highly individual. The specific events people encounter are quite diverse, and people they are different in how they respond to similar events. Also they vary in the degree to which they identify with the different aspects of their personality. But I would suggest that everybody in American culture, and probably in western culture, is confronted with the repression of childhood sexuality to one degree or another, and experiences a profound alienation from the person he or she most essentially is. Much of an adult’s biography often consists of the effort, with varying degrees of success, to find his or her way back to the lost essence – to what Guntrip calls “the lost heart of the self.”

## ***Repression and Obedience to the entitled elites.***

We naturally ask ourselves how it is possible for an elite minority, committed to maintaining its own entitlement, to gain the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the great majority of people. Most people, after all, have no practical or material interest in supporting a system that is engineered with the clear intent of concentrating a disproportionate amount of wealth and decision making authority in the hands of a small elite. When necessary, a variety of techniques, including various forms of state terrorism, are employed to keep in line those who must do with less. However, terrorism is crude, expensive, visible, and dangerous, and it always leads to a back-lash. A more subtle and less visible means of oppression must be found. If the system of domination by the elite is to work, it must ultimately rely on the have-nots' internalizing their oppression. The repression of childhood sexuality creates a character structure in the average citizen that makes this internalization of repression possible.

The repression of childhood sexuality produces adults who seek above all else the love and approval of the sadistic super-ego. Fire has defeated fire. Eros has been turned against itself. External representatives of the sadistic super-ego are found in all the authority figures of society. Children learn to seek the love of the very ones who repress them. They learn not to ask whether the demands of the beloved authority are in their interest.

The repression of childhood sexuality produces adults who are profoundly alienated from their true selves. They do not know what they want. Alienation from the true self results in a restlessness that is characterized by a deep sense of unfulfillment, boredom, and a longing for a vague something that is not found in the immediate situation. Such individuals are easily manipulated by propaganda that offers spurious explanations for their unfulfillment, war-mongering that promises relief from their boredom, and advertisements that promise to satisfy their vague longings.

The repression of childhood sexuality produces adults who are lonely. This loneliness derives from their character structure. It is a loneliness

that will not be touched by any relationship they are able to establish. This loneliness has two causes.

First, as the alienated person doesn't even know who he or she really is, there is no way to bring the true self into relationship with others – even if the opportunity presents itself in the external world.

Second, the repression of childhood sexuality leads to a split between sex and relationship. Eros has been split. It now seeks sex and significant relationships in separate spheres. I am not suggesting here that every significant relationship must be sexual – certainly not in the usual meaning of the term. But every significant relationship must be erotic. Eros is the desire for union with the other. We see its prototype in the infant's love of the mother through the breast. With the new-born, society has not yet been able to split Eros into separate components – the desire for relationship vs. the desire for bodily pleasure.

Even in friendships where there is no desire for genital contact, or in the most sublimated relationships, we discover a physical substrate. We take pleasure in seeing and being seen, in hearing and being heard, in touching and being touched, even in simple proximity. It is not always clear why one relationship seeks one kind of bodily expression and another relationship another. What is clear, however, is that human beings are polymorphous in their loving, with regard to both the kinds of bodily expressions they desire, and the kinds of relationships that are sought out. One looks forward to the day when society will not feel the need to deny the polymorphic nature of love, and to micromanage the love-lives of its citizens.

It is worth while to examine the political ramifications of the peculiar kind of loneliness created by the repression of childhood sexuality. Typically this repression creates individuals who have difficulty bonding deeply with other human beings. On the other hand they are not able to attain any satisfying sense of oneness with the ground of being – with the All. With such persons, their gang, their religious group, or their nation becomes the sphere of their primary bonding experiences. Emotionally speaking, this group becomes God for them.



Individuals who are able to bond both with other individuals and with the ultimate “spirit that runs through all things,” as Wordsworth would describe it, may also bond with intermediate groups. They may well take comfort in their family, be committed to their schools, feel affection for their church or club, take pride in their country, etc. But they will not confuse, on either cognitive nor emotional levels, these intermediate groups with God, nor the norms of these groups with the will of God. Because people who are alienated from their true selves seek the love and approval of sadistic super-ego figures, and because they seek bonding in god-like groups, they are highly prone to become zealots in rigid and authoritarian religions, or super-patriots in fascist states. Their gods generally bear an uncanny resemblance to the sadistic super-ego.

It seems clear then, that individuals who belong to the entitled elites that control various religious and political bodies for their own benefit, have a vested interest in the repression of childhood sexuality. It produces individuals who are blindly committed to sadistic and punishing authority figures who exploit them ruthlessly. It produces individuals who will commit themselves to religious and political organizations that do not have their interests at heart. And here we find at least a good part of the explanation for that very peculiar phenomenon we see in modern democracies. People, especially working people on the lower end of the economic ladder, repeatedly vote into office leaders who obviously do not hold their needs or welfare as high priorities. The conclusion seems unavoidable. A society that is severely repressive of childhood sexuality cannot be a well functioning democracy.

If the state is able to control the sexuality of children, defined as individuals up to eighteen years of age, then sexual liberation is relatively meaningless. After being subjected to the character deforming effects of repression for eighteen years, an individual is unlikely to be able to do much that is healthy, life enhancing, or deeply fulfilling with his or her liberation upon coming of age.

This connection between sexual repression and the authoritarian personality needed by fascist states was seen very clearly by several of Freud’s disciples, but perhaps more clearly by Wilhelm Reich than

any other. Consider this summary of his views by Paul Robinson, the author of “The Freudian Left.”

*The connection between sexual repression and the authoritarian social order was simple and direct: the child who experienced the suppression of his natural sexuality was permanently maimed in his character development; he inevitably became submissive, apprehensive of all authority, and completely incapable of rebellion. In other words, he developed exactly that character structure which would support a regime of injustice and exploitation. The first act of suppression prepared the way for every subsequent tyranny. Here at last was the answer to the riddle of sexual repression. Reich concluded that repression existed not for the sake of moral edification (as traditional religion would have it), nor for the sake of culture (as Freud had claimed), but simply in order to create the character structure necessary for the preservation of an authoritarian social regime.<sup>12</sup>*

While I feel that Reich has correctly identified a fact of political life that is of central concern, I would hasten to emphasize that his understanding of sex is rather different than the one presented here. For him sex is a physical tension in need of discharge, surrounded by a somewhat difficult to comprehend mystical aura. The central meaning of sexual fulfillment is the complete release of this tension in a heterosexual genitally focused relationship. I would take exception both to his limiting legitimate sex to heterosexual relationships, and to his focus on genital sexuality to the exclusion of the other forms highlighted by Norman O. Brown.

I have an even more basic concern with both Reich and Freud. I would certainly not deny the physiological roots of sex, nor do I have any interest in denying that the pleasure associated with physiological release is an important piece of the puzzle. However, it seems to me sexual desire, beginning with the pre-genital, orally focused, desire of the infant, is always a desire for union with the other. Sex is social from the outset. It becomes a-social or even anti-social only through its repression. Repression leads to a confusion about the true aims of

Eros. If Eros is the desire for union with the beloved then it cannot be said to have accomplished its aim with the mere physical discharge of pent up tensions, but only with the establishment of a loving relationship.

### ***Equating God with the Dominant Social Order***

Frank Elwell summarizes Durkheim's view of the relationship between the individual and society as follows:

*If an individual lacks any source of social restraint she will tend to satisfy her own appetites with little thought of the possible effect her actions will have on others. Instead of asking "is this moral?" or "does my family approve?" the individual is more likely to ask "does this action meet my needs?" The individual is left to find her own way in the world—a world in which personal options for behavior have multiplied as strong and insistent norms have weakened.<sup>13</sup>*

We see here that Durkheim shared Freud's essential pessimism about human nature. Individuals are essentially a-social or even anti-social. A concern about the effects of their actions on others, or on the social fabric as a whole, is foreign to the core of desires that make up their fundamental nature. Without a massive program of repression and control, individuals are dangerous to each other and to the social order. This control must be imposed from the outside. Social norms are internalized, and, in that sense, they become a part of the person, but these social norms remain an essentially foreign introject. Their role is to curb the appetites and inclinations of the individual. Given this function, the ultimate effect of these norms must be to alienate the individual from what he or she most wants.

Durkheim's sociological notion of internalized social norms is the complement of Freud's psychological notion of the super-ego. They are talking about the same phenomenon from two perspectives. Whether Freud and Durkheim are right in their assumption that the repression of individuals by society is justified depends largely on whether individuals are in fact essentially a-social or even anti-social.

Durkheim believed that God was an image of society and that the “will of God” proclaimed by organized religion actually consists of the norms of a particular society. As Frank W. Elwell summarizes Durkheim’s thinking on this point:

*Religion is not only a social creation; it is the power of the community that is being worshiped. The power of the community or society over the individual so transcends individual existence that people collectively give it sacred significance. ...By worshiping God people are worshiping the power of the collective over all, they are worshiping society.”<sup>14</sup>*

Almost exactly the same point is made in Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*. In this equating of God with the power of society, we see the reason for the essentially conservative, repressive, and stultifying nature of most organized forms of religion in most cultures.

In order to grasp the religious and moral significance of God as an image of society, we must shift back to a theological perspective. I would begin with a definition. *God the creator is that which facilitates the increase of value in the universe, in terms of both quantity and intensity*. I have in mind those experiences that any more or less normal person would value: beauty, love, freedom, belonging, understanding, compassion, contributing to the larger whole, excitement, pleasure, health, accomplishment, recognition, self realization, and adventure. These are the things we all live for. This is my own definition, but I think it resonates well with the Whiteheadian view of process theology.

Whatever facilitates an increase in these values is God. If random mutation and natural selection alone are able to produce an increase such values, then they are God. If the creator is a cosmic Nebuchadnezzar who created the universe in seven days, left a few dinosaur bones lying around to confuse the unwary, and rules with an iron hand, so be it. My own suspicion, however, is that both these conflicting images are crude and simplistic fig leaves with which we try to hide the shame of our ignorance. For my part, I would suggest that ignorance

that knows it is ignorance is not a bad starting point in our quest for knowledge.

The fact is that we know very little about God the Creator. We do know that some entity or process has created this exquisite and awesome immensity of which we are a part, and that the process of creation is ongoing. And when we see it with our hearts as well as with our intellects, we know that, as the first creation story in Genesis affirms, “it is good.” That is to say, it is full to over-flowing with value.

A few days ago I watched the death of a large one-celled creature under my microscope. It was, if I identified it correctly, a blepharisma, a large paramecium-like protozoa. As the water dried up on my slide, its membrane suddenly disintegrated. Briefly the cytoplasm continued to be visible and to move. Then, of course, it all became nothing. A minute before I had watched this little creature dashing around in the film of water under the cover slip, happily and energetically pursuing its vocation in life, which, I think, was mainly ingesting bacteria. Although its sphere of consciousness and range of purpose were limited, this activity had value for the creature. It doesn't get any better than this for a blepharisma.

In the little microcosm held between the slide and the cover slip, I came face to face with a simple fact which we all observe in a large number of situations on many different levels. The specific structures that are carriers of value are never permanent. Does whatever consciousness that is associated with the particular entity return to the One? Is it irretrievably lost? Is it preserved in the mind of God? Is it re-incarnated into the next level? I do not know. I suspect that whatever happens at death is no more knowable to us than the external world is to the baby within the womb. But one thing is clear. No particular structure in the world of time and space is permanent. It follows that to equate any particular form or structure with the will of the creator, is a form of idolatry. The creative process uses death, and transcends all particular forms or structures which it uses to further the growth of value.

We see then, that from a theological point of view, organized religion is almost entirely a matter of idolatry. No social form is meant to last

forever, and to equate any specific country, culture or social form with God the Creator is to set oneself in direct opposition to the creative thrust of the universe. In a world of almost universal idolatry, the true prophet, the one who speaks for the creative process – for the expansion of value – is almost necessarily a criminal, a madman or mad-woman, or at least a revolutionary. Durkheim himself noticed this:

*"Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take. How many times, indeed, it is only an anticipation of future morality—a step toward what will be"*<sup>15</sup>

### ***Must We Refrain From Desiring What We Most Want?***

In his contention that the very possibility of civilization rests upon the repression of childhood sexuality, Freud affirmed, I think, what most people believe. This belief is reflected in the underlying conviction that one finds expressed in a variety of ways: children, like horses, must be broken if they are to become civilized members of society. It is also reflected in the broad consensus about childhood sexuality that seems to cut across all other divisions between the “right” and the “left”—the consensus that children cannot be permitted to know what they want and to make their own behavioral decisions on the basis of this knowledge.

Why would Freud – the meticulous examiner of the “unconscious” – arrive at such a conclusion? What Freud saw when he examined the fantasies and wishes of his clients was a bit frightening. He described it as a seething cauldron of confused, unrealistic, antisocial and violent impulses, and called it the Id. The Id is the proverbial monster of your dreams. In horror films the Id is the monster that appears on the horizon and lumbers menacingly toward the city, or emerges like the creature from the black lagoon to threaten innocent children. If the Id, as Freud saw it, did in fact represent our deepest nature and the repository of what we most want, then Freud’s pessimism was indeed justified. In that case, life in a world where people were allowed to know and seek what they most wanted would be (as Hobbs would describe it) ugly, violent, brutish and short. But a simple fact is often over-

looked. The Id that Freud viewed under his analytic microscope was the creation of a highly repressive culture. It was the heart of the self after it had already been crushed, distorted, brought to despair, enraged and made violent by repression.

It is certainly true that at times we cannot have what we want. First and foremost, we must respect the rights of others for self-determination – sexual and otherwise. It is never all right to impose our fulfillment on an unwilling world. Also, for various reasons, we may have to choose between conflicting wants. To choose to have one thing is to choose not to have something else. At times, what we want may simply not be available. But to restrain oneself in the name of practicality or morality is not at all the same thing as repression. The aim of repression is bring to a person to the point where he or she does not even know what is desired. A repressed person cannot choose to have what he or she wants even when it is available and entails no harm to others. A truly civilized restraint would be a rational and conscious process. If we are to create a network of mutually sustaining and enriching relationships with one another, civilized restraint is necessary. Repression is not.

### ***The Dynamics of Identification, Introjection and Projection***

Guntrip relates the following observations about a client of his:

One patient, a simple woman in her early forties, in whom ‘the illness’ so seriously sabotaged her capacity to carry on normal relationships that it was only with great difficulty that she could keep a job, revealed this internal self-persecutory situation naively and without disguise. She would rave against girl children and in fantasy would describe how she would crush a girl child if she had one, and would than fall to punching herself (which perpetrated the beatings her mother gave her). One day I said to her, ‘You must feel terrified being hit like that.’ She stopped and stared and said, ‘I’m not being hit. I’m the one that’s doing the hitting.’<sup>16</sup>

Commenting on this and on another similar situation, Guntrip says, “We see in an unmistakable way the anti-libidinal ego as an identification with the angry parent in a vicious attack on the libidinal ego which is denied comfort, understanding, and support, treated as a bad selfish child, and even more deeply feared and hated as a weak child.”<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps everything I am trying to say in this essay is contained in an embryonic fashion in this powerful image. In order to understand the above scenario, it is essential that we know what is being described: this is a love relationship – the woman’s first one. That is why she clings to this relationship, as painful and destructive as it is. A non-conflicted relationship is not a possibility for this woman. Love and violence are too strongly welded together. They were welded together by the beating of the child – which was an intensely sexual event for both the mother and the child. The alternative to this relationship is no love relationship – a choice that would entail falling into the abyss of absolute loneliness.

Anna Freud described “identification with the aggressor” as one of the primary defense mechanisms used to protect us from terrifying and overwhelming situations. This defensive maneuver is possible because in any relationship – real or internalized – we can choose the one with whom we identify. Frequently it seems better to identify with the aggressor. After all, s/he is the one doing the hitting.

From a broader perspective we always retain a dual identification. The woman in the example above was, on some level, both the one doing the hitting and the one being hit. We see this dual identification even in non-conflicted and non-sadistic love relationships. The beloved is always the other through whom I overcome my loneliness, and, at the same time, an aspect of myself – a part of my potential self – someone I must become if I am to grow toward wholeness.

The dynamics of introjection and projection must be understood if we are to make sense of the relationship between our personal inner lives and the external social situations that we discover and create around us. Psychic structure grows out of the introjection of other people and of the dramatic events that have transpired between them and us. The



characters and the dramatic scenarios that are thus created within us are then invariably re-projected into the world, where they provide the personal templates around which we organize our interpersonal relationships. The psychological and social levels of reality interact through a continuing process of introjection, inner re-structuring, re-defining our possibilities, projection, experimenting with new ways of being, and then introjection again. When our conflicts, hopes and struggles are projected into the world, we encounter opportunities to become new people. In the continuing process of introjection and projection we find the dialectic of growth. The same process can also lead to a dialectic of futility – to a more or less hopeless repetition of old and destructive scenarios – if we are unable to envision new possibilities or we encounter nothing in the situation that would facilitate any changes.

Enactments of oppression and punishment become introjected into the victim and contribute to the structure of his or her personality. The child tends to identify with the oppressor – the sadistic parenting figure – because he or she is far stronger than the child. The child correctly perceives that his or her humiliation and suffering are the direct outcome of his or her weakness. Because of this perception, weakness and vulnerability come to be despised. Strength rather than kindness, gentleness, tenderness, fairness, openness or any of the more humanizing qualities is what is most admired in the sadistic super ego figure. On a personal level, this contempt for perceived weakness and for vulnerability makes interpersonal intimacy difficult if not impossible to achieve. On the larger political level it predisposes the individual to support strong and ruthless leaders.

The totalitarian or fascist social group is the natural repository of the projections of the inner drama of the sexually repressed individual. Typically such a group is dominated by a strong authority figure who aggressively attacks any deviant interest or behavior, and who is suspicious of weakness, spontaneity and vulnerability. This is the sadistic super-ego figure whose love and approval the libidinally repressed person longs for. The compliant self of the repressed person then identifies with the leader (the aggressor) and becomes one of the ones doing the hitting. The drama, in order to complete itself, requires only a

victim – a scapegoat as described in chapter four. Totalitarian and fascist social groups generally have little difficulty identifying appropriate victims. Any people who threaten the vested interests of the entitled class will serve this purpose. It is through the dynamics of repression and identification with the aggressor that the interests of a small minority becomes supported by the majority of the people in a group, most of whom have nothing to gain by advocating the policies of the small entitled elite.

### ***The Over-determination of Oppressive Acts***

When one encounters dysfunctional psychological and social patterns that are recalcitrant to change, frequently one finds that they are overdetermined. This is invariably true with regard to totalitarian social systems. They are created and maintained to support economic and political agendas. But totalitarian regimes are also supported by psycho/sexual dynamics. They enable the enactment of inner scenarios pertaining to the sadistic super-ego, and allow people to seek his or her love and approval. Also they allow people the opportunity to enjoy the direct or vicarious acting out of sadistic, sexually motivated, attacks on selected victims.

### ***Failed Liberations***

Understanding the over-determination of the dynamics of totalitarian social systems gives us a useful clue as to the why revolutions so frequently fail to be truly liberating. The examples of France, Russia and China come to mind. Prior to the well known revolutions in these countries, the mass of the people were subjected to intolerable forms of oppression by entitled elites. Shortly afterward, all three countries reverted to new forms of totalitarian control under Napoleon, Stalin and Mao. Napoleon was only a passing phase in French history, but the question remains as to why a person who was so opposed to the goals of the French revolution was able to take control. One could argue, in the cases of Russia and China, that perhaps a short period of totalitarian control was necessary in order to set up the machinery of a new system. In China, however, it was only with the death of Mao

that it could begin to move in a more democratic direction. With regard to Russia, it is difficult to see anything that would justify the brutal and repressive regime set up by Stalin.

Why do liberators, once they are successful, so frequently become new oppressors? Or perhaps more to the point, how are they able to? There are probably a number of reasons – some of which have to do with the dynamics of money, power and ethnic rivalries. The most significant factor may be, however, that while a revolution – especially a violent and abrupt one – may free the people from a specific tyranny, it does not by itself free people from the need to be tyrannized. The character structure that is created by oppression needs a strong sadistic super-ego figure in control if it is to feel secure and satisfied. So long as this kind of character structure is the dominant one in a society, even in a democracy strong and ruthless sadistic super-ego figures will be elected, and they will be able to create an essentially fascist state that supports the vested interest of the elite at the expense of the needs of the majority. Such a democracy will find ways of excluding disturbing ideas and images from the public debate. It is indeed disconcerting to realize that a country can have the external forms of a democracy and still effectively be a fascist state.

A real revolution requires a change in character structure. This does not come out of the barrel of a gun but out of the printed and spoken word, and out of new kinds of interpersonal relationships. This was perhaps better understood by the womans' movement and the civil rights movements than by most revolutions, and it helps to explain the power and success of these two movements. Both movements focused on changing how people thought and spoke, and the changes in social institutions and patterns flowed from that.

Consciousness must be raised by focusing on the salient questions. How are we to understand ourselves in relation to those who oppress us? How are we to raise children who are not so willing to surrender their interests to any entitled elite? How do we establish a sense of community with others without sacrificing autonomy? Perhaps a fourth question is in order here. How are we avoid establishing ourselves as new tyrants if we are successful?

Revolution is a matter of education, through and through. The re-education of adults who have been raised in the old order is crucial. But the very heart and soul of any revolution that seeks to facilitate more liberated ways of being with one another in the world is the education of children in effective self-determination from the outset. The methods of education must be consistent with its aims. The education of children who are to become citizens in a free society must take place in a caring educational community that maximizes self-determination, critical thinking, and creativity. Everyone intuitively recognizes the revolutionary potential of education. That is why the current power elites are so concerned about retaining absolute control over the thoughts and behaviors of children. That children and adolescents should have the right to self-determination with regard to the full range of their aspirations and desires may be the most revolutionary and potentially liberating idea in the world today.

## ***Conclusion***

Abu Graib is perhaps the perfect image of our fallenness. For this reason it is crucial that we do not scapegoat the few pathetic individuals who actually engaged in the torture. We would then miss the whole point. It is not even enough to see that this kind of torture was condoned by the top leaders in our country, though this is certainly true. Abu Graib was a logical and inevitable outcome of who we are as a people. It was a collective act. Even after the facts about Abu Graib came out and shocked us all, Congress once again sent funds, with hardly any discussion of the matter, to the School of the Americas, where such torture techniques have been taught for decades. Clearly we don't yet get it.

The events at Abu Graib were an expression of our collective policies and will. The press has, of course, cooperated in shielding the American people from what their leaders have been doing. Americans do not like to think of themselves as able to condone, and even enjoy, the events that we were forced to look at in our prisons in Iraq. But the American people have been complicit in maintaining their ignorance. There were ample clues that anyone could have followed up on, and plenty of books and articles that could have corrected the comfortable

and highly edited versions of reality presented in the morning newspapers. The kinds of atrocities that have been committed by Americans and their hirelings need not have been a mystery.

The events in Abu Graib were overdetermined. The actions of those who established the prisons were, of course, motivated by political considerations in the usual sense of the term – that is by the desire to increase the wealth, power and influence of America and the huge multi-national industries whose interests it supports. But the same actions were also sexually motivated. Those doing the torture were gratifying themselves erotically. But it is important to understand that they were not simply acting out their own confused sexual desires. They were enacting the sadistic collective sexual fantasy that pervades the entire culture, as it does all repressive cultures. All the essential characters of the drama were there. Bush and the military authorities as the beloved strong sadistic super-ego figures. The obedient soldiers as the compliant selves. Those who dished out the torture were functioning out of the sadomasochistic self. And, of course, the powerless victims whose real aspirations and wishes had to be crushed, represented the disowned true self. Here we see the nature of Eros after it has been redirected through repression and the identification with the aggressor into the services of entitled elites.

It would be wise for human beings to learn to desire what they most want. At the core of our being we find Eros, the fundamental bio/social structure of our wanting. This Eros is neither evil nor anti-social in its essence. Far from it. Eros becomes negative only through repression. When we delve deeply enough into the nature of our Eros we discover that what we most want is loving relationships. True innocence is not the absence of sexuality, but the state of our sexuality before the vicissitudes of life have separated it from the desire for loving relationships.

Civilization as we know it – that is to say a civilization that is dedicated to the preferential treatment of an entitled elite – requires repression. Repression creates the character structure that is needed for such a civilization. But it is precisely from this kind of civilization that we need to be liberated. Civilization, per se, does not require repression. A society of free persons will not feel the need to repress its children.

Children will be permitted to know what they want. And, in so far as the rights of others and the requirements of reality allow, they will be enabled to pursue what they most want with self-determination. We need not be afraid of the people we most truly are, nor of the people our children are.

The justification of class entitlement in any form was the wrong turn that humanity took. This was the original sin. It was the fall. It was the event that alienated us from our essential nature as loving, and profoundly social human beings. A number of historical scenarios are possible to explain how this wrong turn came about. We can speculate about this historical question, but the evidence is sparse, and I doubt that we will ever be able to know for sure. What we do know is that this wrong turn did happen, that it was a collective event, and that it is deeply embedded in the ideas and practices of every major culture in the world today. We also know that it is not the way things have to be.

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