

Violence and Capacity to Hate

Subjects: Psychology

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Modern Western society does not contemplate any space for the expression of hate and, as always happens in these cases, opposite emotions are stressed as a defensive mechanism. Indeed, we are a society based on the supposed freedom, equality and valorisation of minorities. This reaction formation, which involves the removal of an unpleasant emotion (i.e., hate, which is connected to fear as will be seen later), has the advantage of freeing our society from the unbearable feelings of guilt deriving from the idea of hating others, their role models, their experiences and their right to be in the world and organise their society differently from ours. In fact, those who never hate, cannot feel guilty.

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1. Introduction: The Failure to Recognise Hate within Modern Western Society

This mechanism has a side effect: the impoverishment of our society due to the lack of a possible and fruitful contamination with other types of society. Western efforts aimed at solidly maintaining the removal of hate involve a considerable waste of social and economic energy. In fact, except within the world of sport, where hate is genuinely expressed through competition and which our society allows because the sporting “game” is placed in that transitional area between fiction and reality that never affects the existing political status quo, in all other aspects of life, the emotion of hate must be rooted out. Western political forces often underline the need to fight against “the politics of hate”. Citizens’ street protests are ignored by government institutions if peaceful, but harshly condemned, and therefore rejected in toto, if there is any hint of violence within them. In the Anglo-Saxon world—a world with very strong colonialist tendencies—hate is experienced so badly that specific styles of reaction formation are implemented, which take different names based on the context of application. In academia, it is called “decolonisation of curricula”. This term indicates a government’s prescription to universities to remove from the training curricula any trace of “supremacy” of the “male and white Western world” over the rest of the world in order to ensure an equal value to the theories and scientific results of ethnic minorities. In short, decolonising university curricula means rejecting the status quo of Western (i.e., male and white; the term “Caucasian” would be too geopolitically embarrassing) hegemony of knowledge to promote alternative visions and greater academic integrity. These ideological prescriptions, which constrain educational institutions to modify their training curricula, clash with the scientific method, according to which training courses do not change due to ideologies, but rather to different scientific results. Science is perfectly egalitarian: if a Western white male says something that does not agree with the existing body of literature in that field, the content is discarded. Despite this simple basic consideration, the “decolonisation of curricula” is being carried out with the utmost force, precisely to maintain the removal of latent hate and associated feelings of guilt. Such a psychic problem can be narratively described as follows: the dyad “hate-sense of guilt” within our society is so strong and impossible to be acknowledged that the existence of differences is impeded. Assigning greater importance to Sigmund Freud, a white Western male, in the development of psychology, compared to Shirdi Sai Baba, an Indian mystic who lived at the turn of the twentieth century, is something so evident that it should not require further explanation. However, the choice to exclude the Indian mystic from the university program is associated with the history of Western colonialism and triggers the psychic alarm, which signals the existence of a very unpleasant emotional charge deriving from the combination of hate and guilt. The terror of being identified as the “white western colonialist male” is at this point so strong that, in order to avoid this psychic outcome, we decide to dedicate space in the university course on the pioneers of psychology to Shirdi Sai Baba.

2. Hate in Young Children

In children, hate is a natural emotion and occurs from birth. New borns hate the absence of breast milk just as they love its presence when they are hungry. In other words, they desire the proximity of the good object that satisfies their needs, and they desire distance from the frustrating object that makes their stomach cramp ^[1]. Therefore, the affective macro-category of love arises from the desire for closeness, the affective macro-category of hate arises from the desire for

distance from the object. Both promote the identity constitution of the child and future adult. The multisensory experience of breastfeeding for a new born is the equivalent of an adult's relationship with the world around him/her. In fact, the external world of new borns gets more and more extended over time, and this corresponds with the good growth of the subject: from the uterus to the breast, from the breast to the main caregiver, from the main caregiver to the secondary caregiver, from the secondary caregiver to the family, from the family to the social group. Therefore, the presence of the affective macro-categories of love and hate in the mind is inevitable, and characterises a good psychic development. It is the temporality that guards the birth of these two polarities. In fact, a breastfed new born will sooner or later be full, and will subsequently experience the absence of milk. The encounter between the milk of the external world and the internal need of the new born can take place with good or bad timing, and a pleasant or unpleasant affective modality. These early relational experiences, repeated over time, constitute the precursors of the relational modalities of the future adult. We have introduced the concept of affective macro-categories to indicate the two main psychic organisers of the world. The dyad love–hate or proximity–distance represents only the first affective dimension characterising the individual–external world relationship. This is a primitive affective dimension from the point of view of psychic and social development. At the neurophysiological level, it is associated with the fight–flight functioning of the brainstem, the oldest part of the human brain, and which is also possessed by reptiles. It organises the world into two categories, friend or foe, good or bad, with me or against me. There is a vast body of literature on the psychic functioning within this organisation of the individual–external world relationship (e.g., [2][3][4]). This is the relational organisation that characterises wars and strong polarisations within a social group. When there is good relational development, there is psychic growth, and within those two macro-categories increasingly complex emotions emerge, for example, embarrassment, shame, melancholy, surprise or betrayal.

3. Pioneering Contributions: Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott on the Development of Antisocial Tendencies

To summarise in a single section the clinical thinking of the two most important pioneers on the subject of the development of antisocial tendencies is not an easy task. In this section the core issues are presented, but for a more detailed study the reader should refer to the original contributions.

Melanie Klein's core contributions on this subject are: *Criminal tendencies in normal children*, 1931 [5]; *The early development of conscience in the child*, 1933 [6]; *On criminality*, 1934 [7]; *Notes on some schizoid mechanisms*, 1946 [8]; and *Envy and gratitude; a study of unconscious sources*, 1957 [9]. According to Kleinian clinical thought, antisocial behaviour is based on the death instinct, an innate drive that resides within the Id. This innatist vision of death drive, on the one hand, illustrates the need of that historical period to highlight the biological correspondent of a psychic manifestation, due to the fact that the majority of psychoanalysts at that time had medical training; on the other, it simplifies the explanation of the roots of violent behaviour. Therefore, Melanie Klein, through child clinical observation, underlines how life instinct (responsible for love and its derivatives) and death drive (responsible for hate and its derivatives) reside in the Id since birth, and how they organise a new born's early relationships with the outside world. However, if the origin of hate and violence in childhood is quite simple in Melanie Klein's thinking, their effects are not. Death drive distorts the infant's parental imagos (the infant's or child's internal parental representations). The stronger the force of death drive, the greater the imagos will be perceived as persecutory. In other words, the more intense the death drive in the infant's internal world, the more terrible and fearful will be its perception of caregivers. This "new born-external world" relational organisation is called by Melanie Klein "paranoid-schizoid" position. "Schizo", because the new born's reality is precisely "split" into two opposite polarities: friend–enemy, hate–love, me good–you bad. "Paranoid", to underline the projective mechanism which underlies this dynamic: new borns experience an affective charge of innate hate (death drive); this is unbearable for a new born's psyche and therefore is projected onto the main caregiver to get rid of it; the caregiver is perceived as monstrous and persecutory; new borns re-introject the figure of the caregiver who has become persecutory (depositing it within the Super-Ego); in the internal world of new borns, the fear and the need to defend themselves from such external (and internal) representations, with potentially violent behaviours, is exacerbated. The stronger the thrust of death drive, the greater the amount of hate and its derivatives to be projected onto the caregiver, the greater the persecutory nature of the internalised parental imago, and the greater the fear and need of new borns to defend themselves from such external dangers with violent behaviours. This vicious circle is brilliantly described by Melanie Klein in: *The early development of conscience in the child*, 1933.

Curiously, due to the hyper-specialisation of knowledge we are witnessing today, no one realises that this vicious circle is an essential foundation of the body of knowledge of geopolitics and international relations, and takes the name of "security dilemma", published by John Hertz twenty years later [10]. Briefly, the "security dilemma" is based on the fear that one "A" state might be attacked by another "B" state. In this case "A", as a precaution, may decide to expand its internal and external security. This behaviour is read by "B" as a clear indication of "A's" intention to attack "B". State "B" then decides to expand its internal and external security as well. Hence, "A" and "B" continue to raise their security level until

they come to a direct confrontation. Over time, the literature on “security dilemma” has taken various variables into consideration, among which, one of the most important, is greediness (e.g., ^{[11][12]}). For the sake of clarity and brevity, it is left to interested readers to deepen their knowledge of this connection with geopolitical dynamics.

Within this paranoid–schizoid organisation, a new element now takes over for the new born: the realisation that the outside world is not only persecutory and monstrous, but it also supplies good milk that provides nourishment and generates a psychophysiological condition of satisfaction and contentment. This evidence, which makes its way into the new born’s psyche with each episode of breastfeeding, in the good psychic development, breaks the vicious circle described above. Thus, according to the Kleinian clinical description, the new born now enters the “depressive” position. “Depressive”, precisely because he/she realises that it has attacked the external object that provides he/she with care and sustenance. This is how the first feelings of guilt arise, which for Melanie Klein constitute the precursors of the child’s prosocial behaviours. In this “position”, Klein observes that the way a child plays usually expresses reparative tendencies, such as trying to glue a previously broken pencil back together; new borns then display an ever-growing desire to be loved, to love and to be at peace with the world around them; a more real and less monstrous perception of caregivers; a reduction of fear in their internal world; a renewed confidence in the outside world.

4. Conclusions: Violence vs. Capacity to Hate

At the basis of the violent individual–external world relationship, there is always the fight–flight psychic configuration that, as we have mentioned, polarises the world into friend–foe or good–bad. This psychic configuration implies a serious side effect: the denial of “otherness”. The others, those who are different, with their needs, their emotions, their right to be in the world and actively participate in everyday life, simply do not exist. They end up in the psychic macro-category of the “enemy” who must be attacked, or from whom one must flee. The specificity of this psychic macro-category lies in the fact that the attributes of the “enemy” do not derive at all from knowing the enemy, but are the result of splits and projections of the subject, who, therefore, sees in others that which they just do not tolerate in themselves. Consequently, in this case nothing new is ever learned from the world and from the succession of events. There is only a constant repetition of the same relational dynamic applied to different external objects, which, for the subject, never differ; indeed, they never possess an existence of their own. They only exist as more or less suitable “coat hangers” for the subject’s projections.

The effects of the fight–flight psychic configuration were also evident in the public health arena. In November 2021, we compared COVID-19 vaccines distribution with the existing geopolitical relationships. It is sad to admit that health devices made to save people’s lives were not distributed based on the effectiveness shown in scientific studies but based on geopolitical influences ^[12]. This result showed the power of such psychic configuration, which prevailed even during a pandemic, in which one would expect a genuine cooperation between different nations.

Moreover, there is an even worse side effect of the individual–external world relationship discussed here; that of the psychic structure being passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, a family totally permeated by this psychic impoverishment, infects its own children, so that they will have numerous difficulties in emancipating themselves from this internal structure. A society totally permeated by this psychic impoverishment infects the next generation. These new generations will then perceive different societies, with their own models and experiences, as external objects to be demolished, conquered, or shunned. In fact, learning something new from the outside world implies recognition of “otherness”, recognition of the differences of such an external world with respect to the subject, a characteristic which the friend–foe structure is totally lacking. On the other hand, such a characteristic is at the basis of the capacity to hate.

Within this other psychic configuration there is, therefore, the full recognition of diversity, which is of nourishment for the object and for the subject. In the child, the first verbal manifestation of the affective macro-category of hate is the word “no”. Which means “you are different from me”, “that thing is not part of me”. Identity could not exist except as a result of the continuous and fluctuating desires of proximity (identification) and distance (expulsion) from external objects. Therefore, the capacity to hate implies a serene acceptance of the affective macro-category of hate within our internal world, within our institutions, within our society. To acquire such capacity, the person, the institution, the society must learn to competently hate. If hate is not associated with knowledge, it becomes a preconceived judgment, and with it, we enter the friend–foe psychic configuration, which has been widely discussed. To competently hate, there is a need to know the “others”, to understand their values and personal feelings, to understand their differences; to avoid assuming that our standards are recommendable to others; to avoid exporting the models with which we see the world. Our society has enough fragilities to allow us to learn from others. A wonderful opportunity presents itself: to be able to hate in order to know, grow and be enriched through the relationship with diversity.

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