

WAR: A PSYCHOANALYTIC CONCERN ?

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PREFACE

First of all I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you some thoughts I have on the dynamics of war, and to be able to have your comments later which will help me in my explorations.

It is not for me to define psychoanalysis and its concerns, but I would like to present to you the evolution of a way of thought about war, which for me, anyway, became inextricably interwoven with thinking about the psychodynamics of my patients. You may find variable degrees of congruence between what I shall present and your psychoanalytic concerns.

I found that my concerns about war could not be hived off from other concerns. In other words, the more I looked at war, in spite of the magnitude of suffering which resulted from it, the less did it appear as some monolithic external monster. Not only were there many kinds of wars, but aspects of wars seemed quite connected to the non-monster, even admired aspects of

humans. Inevitably, I was led to think about human nature. Indeed, it seems that all theories of war include a philosophy of human nature. So in this presentation I will touch on views of human nature, and I will touch on how study of war and also other traumas has helped me see patients in a slightly different light.

What I propose to do now is to briefly review the psychoanalytic literature on war. Then I would like to present some thoughts of mine derived from studies of soldiers, wars and of humans under stress. Lastly, I'll suggest how I think psychoanalytic thinking may be particularly germane to the elucidation of the nature of wars.

PSYCHOANALYTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

You will note that theories of war are extrapolations from psychoanalytic theories of the times. In particular, they reflect views on where reside the central problems of humans, in their nature or in their environment. When it comes to war, most psychoanalytic

literature sides with the view that the problem is internal to human nature. However, other views are also present.

A. WAR AS PART OF HUMAN NATURE

This view of war is represented by Freud and Klein in the death instinct, Oedipal theories, and applications of the paranoid and depressive positions.

1. DEATH (DESTRUCTIVE, AGGRESSIVE) INSTINCT.

FREUD developed his theories of war after he had abandoned his environmental or traumatic theories of neuroses. Thus the main brunt of Freud's view of war was the release of an innate instinct. In Thoughts for the Times on War and Death (1915), he explained the cruelties of the First World War as a "temporary satisfaction of the instincts." (p 285). His view of human nature stated, "...judged by our unconscious wishful impulses, we ourselves are, like primeval man a gang of murderers." (p 297). In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), Freud still maintained, "Man is a wolf to man...savage beast to whom consideration

towards his own kind is something alien." (p 111-112)

In 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud introduced the concept of the death instinct, in order to explain two conundrums- traumatic neuroses, and aggression sadism and masochism. The death instinct explained the need to return to trauma, and masochism. Sadism and aggression was the death instinct turned outward to preserve the self.

Freud was not interested in war thereafter. He was irritated by having to interrupt other work to answer Einstein's open letter "Why War?" (Einstein and Freud, 1932). His answer held nothing new. "..instincts are only of two kinds..Eros or sexual..[and] instinct of hatred and destruction." (p 209).

These views persisted and were reflected after the Second World War by Glover (1946) and Strachey (1957).

KLEIN was the other main proponent of a primary death instinct, which she said was present from birth. Klein said, "I hold that anxiety arises from the operation of the death instinct..." (1946, p 4), and she held the death instinct to be the prime source of anxiety. Thus the baby discharges its death instinct into the breast, which becomes persecuting as the death instinct may be reabsorbed. The death instinct which

remains in the infant is discharged outward as aggression (Segal, 1975, p. 25). Envy of the breast gives special impetus to the death instinct (Klein, 1957, p. 183).

Through concepts of good and bad projections, Klein maintained the duality of instincts and their hydrostatic nature. Good and bad implied moral judgement, and the primacy of the death instinct continued Freud's pessimism on views of human nature.

COMMENTS ON DEATH INSTINCT. I believe that the death instinct theory of destructiveness extrapolated to war is like a foreclosed argument. A dislikable symptom or social phenomenon is said to be explained by calling it by a different name - death instinct.

It is even arguable whether it is clinically tenable. It seems to me that aggression in patients can always be analyzed as meaningful in terms of needs of life, not death.

Glover (1946) said that understanding war neurotics is essential to understanding war. Yet, to my knowledge, the death instinct was not derived from analysis of war neurotics, nor soldiers, nor dying patients. Observations on these groups does not corroborate the death instinct. For instance Spiegel

(1944) noted that soldiers fought more out of love than hate, and more for somebody than against somebody. Killing and self-sacrifice were incidental to needs of survival, whether of oneself or others. Protecting those one loves may mean killing others. As far as dying patients, I have noted elsewhere that dying patients are also very preoccupied with life issues and meanings. At the same time, acceptance of death is not an internally directed death instinct at last catching up with it its aim, but an achievement of maturity (Valent, 1978).

Intellectually the death instinct stems from 19th century notions of hydrostatics, entropy and reductionism where the smallest part (like biochemistry, brain centre, etc) determine the whole. It is satisfying because it is a foreclosed and self-fulfilling theory. Seeing war as a normal determinist part of human nature allows us to ignore it.

Not surprisingly, few constructive suggestions have come from this theory. Lifting sexual repressions to tilt against the death instinct was one suggestion. Widescale psychoanalysis was another.

2. THE OEDIPAL STRUGGLE

As Money-Kyrle (1937) noted, this was the next psychoanalytic theory of war causation after the pure drive theories. Actually, already in Totem and Taboo Freud (1912) described a purpose after all for the aggression of the gang of murderers- that is the killing of the primal father. In general, the Oedipal theory of war holds that various people and symbols in war represent the people and symbols in the Oedipal struggle.

Thus the enemy may be imbued with one's own hidden Oedipal desires. The fear of enemies raping mothers and sisters is a potent spur to going to war (to kill one's projected desires), while raping enemy mothers and sisters (acting out one's desires with impunity) is one reward of war. Similarly, referring to racial riots in the US, West (1967) suggested that the Negro represented hidden incestuous desires. It was the black man, not oneself, whose big penis was desirous of ravishing one's mothers and sisters. Hitler saw the Jewish penis as very successful in seducing German women.

In this theory the fear of castration is also played out. Lasswell (1965) suggested that the fear of the enemy is castration anxiety. Hitler used the lie

that Poles had castrated German soldiers as one excuse to invade Poland. War allows enemy soldiers to be castrated, and thus to avoid one's own castration anxieties.

Money-Kyrle (1951), suggested that the Oedipal father may be split - the good father being one's leader, while the punishing father being the enemy leader.

Freud, and Strachey (1957) among many have suggested that weapons are phallic symbols. On the other hand, mother may be symbolized by territory (motherland). Lacombe (1963) attempted an Oedipal type analysis of the 1956 Suez War. He suggested that the Suez Canal represented mother's breast, and the French, English and Israelis were the rival brothers fighting for it. While this kind of analysis may be far fetched, the relevance of Oedipal conflicts in leaders may be more valid.

The Oedipal conflicts of leaders played out in politics may contribute to war. Shaka (Ritter, 1987) who founded the zulu empire last century was the product of an incest taboo marriage. He and his mother were exiled because of this. In exile, Shaka was over-close to his mother, and stayed so all his life. Shaka had been taunted about the size of his penis in

the place of exile. As a successful leader, he had daily public baths, where his penis could be duly admired. His conquests, at least to some extent further proved his manhood. He slew his taunters, and those who had derided his mother. He elevated his mother to a kind of goddess, and proffered her the choicest parts of war loot. After his mother died, he forbade sex, fertility and drinking of milk, on pain of death. He lined up his warriors naked, and enticed them with naked women. Any who showed a sign of erection were slain on the spot, on the grounds that they did not show proper mourning for his (and their) mother. His excesses after his mother died led to Shaka's assassination.

Little (1988) describes how Ronald Reagan was closely attached to his mother. She introduced him to acting, and they played married couples in church plays. Reagan saw his father as a weak alcoholic.

His autobiography "Where is the Rest of Me?" takes its name from what he saw as the ultimate line from his acting career. In the book on which this second rate movie is based, the father and daughter have an incestuous relationship. In the film Reagan woos the daughter and the father cuts off his legs. When he wakes up in hospital he cries out, "Where is the rest

of me?" We may speculate that Reagan's concern for missiles and being a great warrior against the Evil Empire were a way of trying to get the rest of him back. But we must be careful in simple one to one transpositions from Oedipal conflicts to leaders and war. For instance Reagan was the first leader to enter agreements on destruction of missiles.

COMMENT Oedipal conflicts seem to add some colour and meaning to aspects of war. But like with the death instinct, it is too hazardous to attribute cause of war to it.

Furthermore, it is possible that some social aspects of the Oedipus complex have survival value for the group. Sociobiology (Wilson, 1975) shows us that the primal horde (Freud 1912) has some validity among some higher primates like the baboons. The dominant male in these groups has greater sexual access and fertility, associated with higher testosterone levels. This enables the best genes to be propagated in the breeding community. This male also has greater access to food, shelter and comforts. The submissive adolescents are peripheral males with low testosterone and fertility. These adolescents also do much of the fighting against predators and other groups. They have

higher mortality rates. It is interesting to speculate whether low testosterone levels, low fertility and high mortality resulting from submission to the dominant male is in part the biological basis of castration anxiety.

The dominant male also has duties to the group. He directs them to food through his greater wisdom. He distributes the food. He keeps order in the group and metes out justice. And he may lead the defence against predators or other groups. He is like leaders of groups and absolute monarchs have been till recent times.

When the dominant baboon fails to be an asset to the group, he can be replaced, often by a coalition of peripheral males. This may be the equivalent of killing of the primal father. An equivalent to this occurs in combat groups, when it is felt that the father of the group is more dangerous than the danger from which he is supposed to protect. The killing of group leaders occurred frequently in the First World War and Vietnam. On a larger scale, kings may be killed if they bleed their sons too much. This occurred with Shaka, and in other revolutions like the French Revolution or more recently with the Shah of Iran, and with Marcos in the Phillippines.

3. OBJECT RELATIONS THEORIES

These are propounded by Money-Kyrle (1937, 1951), Jacques (1955), Fornari (1975), and Segal (1987) in a paper delivered at the inauguration of the International Psychoanalysts against Nuclear Weapons in Hamburg in 1985.

These writers draw on the Kleinian theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. In the paranoid-schizoid position the death instinct is initially channelled to part objects like the nipple or breast. The latter become extended in time to mother as a whole, the stranger, the strange group and the strange nation. The paranoid-schizoid position has characteristic defences - denial, splitting, projective identification, and projection. These defences lead to denial of murderousness in oneself. One's side is seen as good, the projected on others are murderous.

According to this theory, persecutory anxieties are played out concretely in war. It becomes a relief to be able to fight real enemies instead of internal persecutors. The only reason war is not a psychotic illness equivalent is because there are real enemies.

War may not only serve as a defence against paranoid anxieties. It may also serve as a defence

against anxieties of the depressive position. Guilt for killing loved ones, sorrow, mourning and need for reparation are all avoided by a regression to the paranoid position. Translating this into politics means that finding external enemies is a relief from having to deal with severe internal problems which need repairing or mourning.

Apart from the intrapsychically determined aspects of this theory (harking back to the death instinct), its insights, I believe, have become incorporated among students of conflict and war.

It is well accepted that when there is internal strife or depression it is tempting to make external wars. Blainey (1977) noted that between 1823 and 1937 at least 31 wars (the majority of sizable wars) were preceded by serious disturbances in one of the fighting nations. More recently, the Second World War was preceded by a great Depression. Even in quite recent times Americans, internally burdened by the lost Vietnam War, impotent with a prolonged hostage crisis, and with President Carter sharing with the people the difficulties of government, were restored in their morale by Reagan who saw the world simply, won a war in Grenada, and silenced a terrorist leader in Lybia by dropping bombs on him. Similarly, Thatcher's war with

Argentina spurred her popularity.

The black and white view of neighbours who may also serve as enemies is well accepted, too. Neighbouring tribes and nations are often traditional enemies. On some small islands small populations may be divided into two hostile factions. In recent times we saw the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka at war, and the Indians and Fijians in Fiji. The implication is that these enemy neighbours are used as the rationale or the scapegoats to explain internal problems for which there seem no solutions.

COMMENT We must be wary here too, of making this a universal principle of war, because not all wars are preceded by internal strife, and not all neighbours are hostile. However, what is realized fairly widely now, is that once countries enter a paranoid framework, they do tend to think of each other in primitive splits, and deny their own contribution to a spiralling cycle of reciprocated paranoia. This is the psychology of Cold Wars and arms races.

Methods of dealing with this paranoid tendency include as Lasswell (1965) suggested, "political (psycho)analysis", where distortions are corrected publicly. Secondly, the vicious spiral may be reversed

by well publicised acts of friendship and invitations to trust. There is a whole science developing in this area, and it has been applied in the first Detente between the US and Russia in the time of Kennedy, and currently in possibly a new Detente.

4. GROUPS

To some people groups crystallize, and enact the inner instincts of destructiveness. Freud (1921) in Group Psychology prefaced his study with LeBon's and McDougall's views of groups as persecutory packs. From LeBon to Segal (1987), it is said that the most primitive instincts and the most primitive psychotic anxieties are bound and expressed in groups. Even the intense love among group members serves only the better execution of hateful aggression to the outside.

Aspects of groups which are seen to lead to destructiveness, are the dissolution of personal boundaries, conscience, will, judgement and freedom. The group is dominated by the will of its leader, often portrayed as fanatical and narcissistic, if not actually psychotic.

Bion (1961), though he acknowledges the positive aspects of the work group, nevertheless stresses the

lack of rational thinking ability of the basic assumption groups fuelled by Fight-Flight paranoia or dependency needs which are always present in groups. The later Tavistock groups seem to have confirmed this, and also that larger groups generate more affect and a tendency to irrationality.

COMMENT Groups may seem antithetical to those who treasure individuality and autonomy. But groups have allowed man to survive hostile predators and harsh environments through the greater power and flexibility of groups relative to the otherwise vulnerable individual human. For groups to function effectively, individuals have to give up their autonomy. It is not groups which are bad in themselves, but how they may be abused.

Groups, like soldiers, politicians, and so on have to be studied in their own right.

B. THE HUMAN CONDITION

This is an intermediate position between human nature being the cause of war, as against external

events being the cause.

This position is exemplified by Koestler (1974), Fromm (1977) and Blomfield (1987). These authors point out that human infants are the most vulnerable species for the longest time, and therefore are most impressionable and prone to needs of symbiosis and attachment. They are later prone to be politically impressionable and exploited, and to attach themselves to false symbols.

It does indeed seem quite probable that the inordinate suggestibility and obedience which humans can exhibit is related to the long period of helplessness and need for others' guidance to survive. Such obedience can be exploited by parents and leaders.

C. WAR DERIVED FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES

Firstly, death or danger from the outside may be denied as much if not more than death and danger from the inside. We may speculate that there is a history of denial of trauma in psychoanalysis.

1. DENIAL

Lifton (1967), who sixteen years after it was dropped, was the first person to make detailed psychological observations on the effects of the atom bomb on its victims, stated that people were interested in things in inverse proportion to their magnitude. Lifton called this kind of denial or dissociation psychic numbing. It may be this numbing which explains how little war has been studied. Hanna Segal (1987), in *Silence is the Real Crime*, exhorts psychoanalysts to deny or be numb no longer.

Denial is now recognized by peace movements as a defence against the enormity of potential terror. They see it as dangerous in leaders and in those who control nuclear weapons, and they see it in the general apathy of those potentially affected by nuclear weapons.

Peace movements did break through mass apathy especially in Europe at the time of the MX and Cruise missile deployments. It seems very likely that they contributed to the current nuclear cutbacks.

Breaking through denial without some hope of effective action, on the other hand, can backlash. The exhorter, who may detail the number of times each member of the audience and the world at large may be incinerated, may feel better for having given himself

some personal psychotherapy, but the audience sinks deeper into apathy and despair.

Joel Kovel (1983) in his book *Against the State of Nuclear Terror*, analyzes denial mechanisms against nuclear terror. He says that psychoanalysts also deny this external terror by placing its source inside the mind, an area where they have power. However, this prevents anything from which politics can be built (p. 54). Psychoanalysts avoid social dynamics and thereby avoid confrontation with power. They treat individual minds, leading comfortable lives. Politicians pursue power without the burden of psychological analysis of their actions. This suits both parties.

Unfortunately socially aware psychoanalysts like Fromm and Kovel also fail to deliver political solutions. They imply that war stems from the social consequences of industrialization and capitalism which has led to alienation, boredom and impersonal technocracies. Their solutions sound more like pleas to go back to some ideal of nature than political programs.

COMMENT It is war as an external danger which produces denial and numbing. It is perceived that one is helpless in the face of an overwhelming danger. Yet,