

especially the people in the so-called underdeveloped countries? Those in power—i.e., the whites—would perhaps be less surprised and indignant if they were not accustomed to considering the yellows, the browns and the blacks as nonpersons and, hence, not expected to react humanly.¹⁴

But there is an additional reason for this blindness. Even the whites, powerful as they are, have surrendered their freedom because their own system has forced them to do so, although in a less drastic and overt way. Perhaps they hate those who fight for it today all the more because they are reminded of their own surrender.

The fact that genuine revolutionary aggression, like all aggression generated by the impulse to defend one's life, freedom or dignity, is biologically rational and part of normal human functioning must not deceive one into forgetting that destruction of life always remains destruction, even when it is biologically justified; it is a matter of one's religious, moral, or political principles whether one believes that it is humanly justified or not. But whatever one's principles in this respect are, it is important to be aware how easily purely defensive aggression is blended with (nondefensive) destructiveness and with the sadistic wish to reverse the situation by controlling others instead of being controlled. If and when this happens, revolutionary aggression is vitiated and tends to renew the conditions it was seeking to abolish.

*Aggression and Narcissism*¹⁵

In addition to the factors already discussed, one of the most important sources of defensive aggression is the wounding of *narcissism*.

The concept of narcissism was formulated by Freud in terms of his libido theory. Since the schizophrenic patient does not seem to have any "libidinous" relationship to objects (either in reality or in phantasy), Freud was led to the question: "What has happened to the libido which has been withdrawn from external objects in schizophrenia?" His answer was: "The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism." In addition, Freud assumed that the original state

¹⁴Skin color has this effect only if it is combined with powerlessness. The Japanese have become persons since they acquired power at the beginning of this century; the image of the Chinese changed for the same reason only a few years ago. The possession of advanced technology has become the criterion of being human.

¹⁵For a more detailed discussion of narcissism, see E. Fromm (1964).

of man in early infancy was narcissism ("primary narcissism"), in which there were not yet any relationships to the outside world; in the course of normal development the child increased his libidinal relationships to the outside world in scope and intensity, but under special circumstances (the most drastic one being insanity) the libido is withdrawn from objects and directed back to the ego ("secondary narcissism"); even in the case of normal development, however, a human being remains to some extent narcissistic throughout his life. (S. Freud, 1914.)

In spite of this statement, the concept of narcissism has not played the important role it deserves in the clinical investigations of psychoanalysts. It has been mainly applied to early infancy and to psychoses,¹⁶ but its far-reaching importance lies precisely in its role for the normal, or the so-called neurotic personality. This role can be fully understood only if narcissism is freed from the restricting frame of reference of the libido theory. Narcissism can then be described as a state of experience in which only the person himself, *his* body, *his* needs, *his* feelings, *his* thoughts, *his* property, everything and everybody pertaining to *him* are experienced as fully real, while everybody and everything that does not form part of the person or is not an object of his needs is not interesting, is not fully real, is perceived only by intellectual recognition, while *affectively* without weight and color. A person, to the extent to which he is narcissistic, has a double standard of perception. Only he himself and what pertains to him has significance, while the rest of the world is more or less weightless or colorless, and because of this double standard the narcissistic person shows severe defects in judgment and lacks the capacity for objectivity.¹⁷

Often the narcissistic person achieves a sense of security in his own entirely subjective conviction of his perfection, his superiority over others, his extraordinary qualities, and not through being related to others or through any real work or achievement of his own. He needs to hold

¹⁶In recent years many analysts have questioned the concept of primary narcissism in infancy and assume the existence of object relations at a much earlier period than Freud did. Freud's idea of the totally narcissistic nature of psychoses has also been abandoned by most psychoanalysts.

¹⁷In the following I deal only with narcissism that manifests itself in the sense of gradiosity. There is another form of narcissism that, although it seems to be the opposite, is only another manifestation of the same thing; I refer to negative narcissism, in which a person is constantly and anxiously concerned with his health to the point of hypochondria. This manifestation is of no importance in this context. It should be noted, however, that the two manifestations are often blended; we need only think of Himmler's hypochondriacal preoccupation with his health.

on to his narcissistic self-image, since his sense of worth as well as his sense of identity are based on it. If his narcissism is threatened, *he* is threatened in a vitally important area. When others wound his narcissism by slighting him, criticizing him, showing him up when he has said something wrong, defeating him in a game or on numerous other occasions, a narcissistic person usually reacts with intense anger or rage, whether or not he shows it or is even aware of it. The intensity of this aggressive reaction can often be seen in the fact that such a person will never forgive someone who has wounded his narcissism and often feels a desire for vengeance which would be less intense if his body or his property had been attacked.

Most persons are not aware of their own narcissism, but only of those of its manifestations which do not overtly reveal it. Thus, for instance, they will feel an inordinate admiration for their parents or for their children, and they have no difficulty in expressing these feelings because such behavior is usually judged positively as filial piety, parental affection, or loyalty; but if they were to express their feelings about their own person, such as "I am the most wonderful person in the world," "I am better than anyone else," etc., they would be suspected not only of being extraordinarily vain, but perhaps even of not being quite sane. On the other hand, if a person has achieved something that finds recognition in the field of art, science, sports, business, or politics, his narcissistic attitude appears not only to be realistic and rational, but is also constantly fed by the admiration of others. In these cases he can give full rein to his narcissism because it has been socially sanctioned and confirmed.¹⁸ In present-day Western society there is a peculiar interconnection between the narcissism of the celebrity and the needs of the public. The latter wants to be in touch with famous people because the life of the average person is empty and boring. The mass media live from selling fame, and thus everybody is satisfied: the narcissistic performer, the public, and the fame merchants.

Among political leaders a high degree of narcissism is very frequent; it may be considered an occupational illness—or asset—especially among those who owe their power to their influence over mass audiences. If the leader is convinced of his extraordinary gifts and of his mission, it will be easier to convince the large audiences who are attracted by men who appear to be so absolutely certain. But the narcissistic leader does not use his narcissistic charisma only as a means for political success; he needs success and applause for the sake of his own mental equilibrium. The idea of his greatness and infallibility is essen-

¹⁸The problem of narcissism and creativity is a very complex one and would need a much longer discussion than is possible here.

tially based on his narcissistic grandiosity, not on his real achievements as a human being.¹⁹ And yet he cannot do without the narcissistic inflation because his human core—conviction, conscience, love, and faith—is not very developed. Extremely narcissistic persons are often almost forced to become famous, since otherwise they might become depressed and insane. But it takes much talent—and appropriate opportunities—to influence others to such a degree that their applause validates these narcissistic dreams. Even when such people succeed, they are driven to seek further success, since for them failure carries the danger of collapse. Popular success is, as it were, their self-therapy against depression and madness. In fighting for their aims, they are really fighting for their sanity.

When, in group narcissism, the object is not the individual but the group to which he belongs, the individual can be fully aware of it, and express it without any restrictions. The assertion that “my country” (or nation, or religion) is the most wonderful, the most cultured, the most powerful, the most peace-loving, etc., does not sound crazy at all; on the contrary, it sounds like the expression of patriotism, faith, and loyalty. It also appears to be a realistic and rational value judgment because it is shared by many members of the same group. This consensus succeeds in transforming the phantasy into reality, since for most people reality is constituted by general consensus and not based on reason or critical examination.²⁰

¹⁹That does not mean that he is nothing but bluff; this is true frequently enough, but not always. Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill, for instance, were very narcissistic persons, yet they did not lack in important political achievements. But these achievements were not such as to justify their feeling of self-assurance and unquestionable rightness often manifested in arrogance; at the same time, their narcissism was limited in comparison with that of a man like Hitler. That explains why Churchill did not suffer from severe mental consequences when he lost the 1948 election, and I assume the same would have been the case with Roosevelt if he had experienced defeat, although the fact must not be ignored that even after political defeat they would have retained a great number of admirers. Wilson’s case may be somewhat different; it would be a subject for study whether his political defeat did not create serious psychic problems that interacted with his physical illness. With Hitler and Stalin the case seems to be clear. Hitler preferred to die rather than to face defeat. Stalin showed signs of a psychic crisis during the first weeks after the German attack in 1941, and it seems likely that he suffered from paranoid tendencies in the last years of his life after he had created so many enemies that he may have sensed he was no longer the beloved father of his subjects.

²⁰Sometimes the consensus even of a small group suffices to create reality—in the most extreme cases even the consensus of two (*folie à deux*).

Group narcissism has important functions. In the first place, it furthers the solidarity and cohesion of the group, and makes manipulation easier by appealing to narcissistic prejudices. Secondly, it is extremely important as an element giving satisfaction to the members of the group and particularly to those who have few other reasons to feel proud and worthwhile. Even if one is the most miserable, the poorest, the least respected member of a group, there is compensation for one's miserable condition in feeling "I am a part of the most wonderful group in the world. I, who in reality am a worm, become a giant through belonging to the group." Consequently, the degree of group narcissism is commensurate with the lack of real satisfaction in life. Those social classes which enjoy life more are less fanatical (fanaticism is a characteristic quality of group narcissism) than those which, like the lower middle classes, suffer from scarcity in all material and cultural areas and lead a life of unmitigated boredom.

At the same time, fostering group narcissism is very inexpensive from the standpoint of the social budget; in fact, it costs practically nothing compared with the social expense required to raise the standard of living. Society has only to pay ideologists who formulate the slogans that generate social narcissism; indeed, many social functionaries, like school teachers, journalists, ministers, and professors, participate even without being paid, at least with money. They receive their reward from feeling proud and satisfied to be serving such a worthy cause—and through enhanced prestige and promotion.

Those whose narcissism refers to their group rather than to themselves as individuals are as sensitive as the individual narcissist, and they react with rage to any wound, real or imaginary, inflicted upon their group. If anything, they react more intensely and certainly more consciously. An individual, unless he is mentally very sick, may have at least some doubts about his personal narcissistic image. The member of the group has none, since his narcissism is shared by the majority. In case of conflict between groups that challenge each other's collective narcissism, this very challenge arouses intense hostility in each of them. The narcissistic image of one's own group is raised to its highest point, while the devaluation of the opposing group sinks to the lowest. One's own group becomes a defender of human dignity, decency, morality, and right. Devilish qualities are ascribed to the other group; it is treacherous, ruthless, cruel, and basically inhuman. The violation of one of the symbols of group narcissism—such as the flag, or the person of the emperor, the president, or an ambassador—is reacted to with such intense fury and aggression by the people that they are even willing to support their leaders in a policy of war.

Group narcissism is one of the most important sources of human aggression, and yet this, like all other forms of defensive aggression, is a reaction to an attack on vital interests. It differs from other forms of defensive aggression in that intense narcissism in itself is a semipathological phenomenon. In considering the causes and the function of bloody and cruel mass massacres as they occurred between Hindus and Moslems at the time of the partition of India or recently between Bengali Moslems and their Pakistani rulers, group narcissism certainly plays a considerable role; this is not surprising if we appreciate the fact that we are dealing here with virtually the poorest and most miserable populations anywhere in the world. But certainly narcissism is not the only cause of these phenomena, whose other aspects will be discussed later.

Aggression and Resistance

Another important source of defensive aggression is aggression as a reaction to any attempt to bring repressed strivings and phantasies into awareness. This type of reaction is one of the aspects of what Freud called "resistance," and it has been explored systematically by the psychoanalytic method. Freud found that if the analyst touched on repressed material the patient would "resist" his therapeutic approach. This is not a matter of conscious unwillingness on the part of the patient or of dishonesty or of secretiveness; he is defending himself against the discovery of the unconscious material without being aware either of the material or of his resistance. There are many reasons why a person may repress certain strivings, often throughout his life. He might be afraid of being punished, of not being loved, or of being humiliated if his repressed impulses were known to others (or to himself, in so far as self-respect and self-love are concerned).

Psychoanalytic therapy has shown the many different reactions resistance can generate. The patient can turn away from the sensitive topic and talk about something else; he can feel sleepy and tired; he can find a reason not to come to the interview—or he can become very angry against the analyst and find some reason to quit the analysis. Here is a brief example: a writer I was analyzing, who was proud of his lack of opportunism, told me during a session that he had changed a manuscript because he thought by this change he would make a better case for his message. He thought he had made the right decision and was surprised that afterwards he felt somewhat depressed and had a headache. I suggested that his real motive probably was that he expected the changed version to be more popular and to result in more fame and money for him than the original one; furthermore, that his depressed