

## THE EVIL SELF

---

**Barry Magid, M.D.**

*Psychoanalysis has always equated the concept of evil with that of psychopathology in one form or another. It is proposed, however, that evil is not reducible to the eruption of aggression, nor to the sadistic manipulation of others, nor indeed any clinical entity, but may exist within a cohesive, conflict-free self, in the form of socially malignant values which function dynamically as a successful part of a system of compensatory structure, in Kohut's sense. A review of biographies of historical figures, including Hitler and Kissinger, is used to illustrate the potential noncongruence between evil and psychopathology, followed by an attempt to define good and evil from a new perspective.*

Psychoanalysis, in seeking to provide a comprehensive theory of the mind, both in health and in illness, has only with great difficulty grappled with the recurrent tendency of the human race to erupt into violence and engage in willfully destructive acts. Many attempts have been made to reduce the problem of evil to varieties of psychopathology. Freud himself felt his conflict-based theory sufficiently inadequate to the task that he posited the existence of a separate death instinct to account for the pervasiveness of war and cruelty.

As psychoanalysis developed historically, it sought first of all to encompass all human behavior under the vicissitudes of instinctual, drive-based phenomena. Psychoanalysts tended to see evil as the eruption of unrestrained primitive aggression, or the frustrated outcome of unmodulated libidinal wishes, that is, as the breakthrough of uncontrolled id impulses through a barrier of repression.

Later, interpersonal and culturally oriented analysts such as Erich Fromm expanded our understanding of character disorders that seek the sadistic control of others and of the environment and that may employ the widespread use of instrumental violence—such as in war—to achieve a variety of psychodynamic needs that are not directly reducible to the failure to manage aggressive affects. Such needs would include a defensive compensation for a sense of inner deadness or emptiness, maintenance of a sense of pride, or revenge of narcissistic injury.

Self psychology, I believe, is now in a position to add a third dimension to these existing perspectives of failure in the realms of drive regulation and object relations. The structuralization of a cohesive self around a core of negative, or evil, ideals (the definition of evil in a more precise way will emerge

---

Address correspondence to Barry Magid, M.D., 33 Greenwich Avenue, #4A, New York, NY 10014.

**DYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall/Winter 1988, Brunner/Mazel, Inc./99**



in the course of this discussion) is a hitherto unrecognized phenomenon that both accounts for the prevalence of evil and removes it from the realm of psychopathology as we normally conceive it. Indeed, I shall propose a definition of evil that distinguishes it from both the impulse disorders and from the sadistic character pathologies. Rather, evil may consist of the construction of a structurally coherent, relatively conflict-free self around a particularly delineated core of ambitions and ideals whose execution—while reinforcing the structural cohesion of the *individual* self—is inimical to the lives of others.

Drive theory, interpersonal theory, and self psychology give rise, in turn, to perspectives that focus on uncontrolled aggressive wishes, the sadistic manipulation of objects, and the consolidation of the evil self. Within each category we can also trace manifestations that occur at different levels of development. Thus, impulse disorders may range developmentally from the chronic rage of the borderline character to the more structurally intact sociopath, who demonstrates a failure of superego development but not a loss of ego boundaries, as does the borderline. Similarly, sadism may manifest itself along a spectrum that includes the malignant destructiveness of a Hitler, those with a purely sexual perversion, and those with an authoritarian personality obsessed with control and obedience.

The evil self, similarly, has its own developmental line. Its developmental failures, or fragmentation products, may be manifested as one of the previously mentioned pathological categories. However, I believe that we can also discern a fully mature evil self that is characterized by the same sense of self cohesion, is guided by strong, well-defined ambitions and ideals, and is free of structural conflict, as is the self we normally think of as having completed a healthy maturation.

I will therefore be attempting throughout this paper to define an evil that is not reducible to, or understandable solely in reference to, some variety of psychopathology, as has been, I believe, the guiding assumption of all previous psychoanalytic investigation. I will attempt to delineate criteria that I think define good and evil selves, and discuss how these inevitably lead us outside our usual clinical perspective into the domains of moral philosophy and religion.

But before entering into the realm of pure evil, I will pause to survey some of the territory previously explored by three distinct sets of psychoanalytic theory, those of Freud, Fromm and Kohut, who, each in his own way, equated evil with psychopathology. In doing so, I will review their differing approaches to aggression, but I hope to demonstrate how the problem of evil is not reducible to the vicissitudes of aggression, in whatever theoretical guise.

Freud (1920) eventually attempted to organize his understanding of destructive behavior, and those phenomena that he grouped together under the rubric of the repetition compulsion, around the concept of a death instinct. He was struggling to understand both the historical and social aspects of destructiveness as had been manifested in the first World War and more circumscribed clinical symptoms such as the repetitive, terrifying dreams of the traumatic war neuroses. These dreams, in which the sleeper relived frightening wartime experiences, were not adequately explained, Freud felt, by recourse to his earlier theory of dream interpretation based on wish fulfillment. They were likewise fundamentally different from anxiety dreams, which he could explain in terms of conflict about the expression of forbidden wishes. For Freud, at this stage of his career, these phenomena were to be understood as a manifestation of an underlying death instinct. In keeping with his overall tension reduction model for the functioning of instincts, Freud now conceptualized the death



instinct "as an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things" (p. 30) or, as he put it more boldly, "the aim of all life is death" (p. 32).

Whereas he had previously seen intrapsychic conflict as resulting from the opposition of the sexual instincts of the id and the self preservative functions of the ego (i.e., the pleasure principle vs. the reality principle), he now presupposes a more fundamental opposition between life and death instincts (eros vs. thanatos). The death instinct, whose natural object is the ego itself, however, can, "under the influence of narcissistic libido, be forced away from the ego" and "emerge in relation to an object" (p. 48). This redirection of the death instinct—from the ego onto objects—becomes the basis for a new theory of sadism, which is now formulated as an attempt at putting instinctual destructiveness into the service of the sexual function. Thus, says Freud, "during the oral stage of organization of the libido, the act of obtaining erotic mastery over an object coincides with the object's destruction, later . . . at the state of genital primacy, it takes on, for the purposes of reproduction, the function of overpowering the sexual object to the extent necessary for carrying out the sexual act."

Freud (1930) later suggested that the force of the superego's attack on the ego and its overall civilizing constraints were energized by the aggressivity of the death instinct. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud wrote, "Aggression is introjected, internalized . . . it is taken over by a portion of the ego which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as superego, and which now in the form of 'conscience' is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other extraneous individuals . . . Civilization therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening it and disarming it and setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city" (p. 464).

The association of evil with untamed or structurally uncontainable aggression as described by this model, and later elaborated in the work of such authors as Klein and Kernberg, who would similarly stress the primacy of aggressive drives, would today perhaps seem most clinically relevant when examining the impulse disorders or the acting out of borderline psychopathology. Such a model has also found its way into the popular stereotype of the urban mugger who impulsively murders his victim when the latter is too slow in handing out his or her wallet. And it is also embodied in the corresponding fantasy of the avenging superego vigilante—the Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson versions of the hero.

Whether such impulse disorders and sociopathy are best explained by Freud's model of unopposed aggressive drives or not, such a character does seem to represent a type of evil-doer, as conventionally understood, whose behavior stems directly from a recognized category of psychopathology, regardless of the psychodynamic explanation that we give it. My point, however, will be that this paradigm fails to describe a whole class of evil individuals, in whom we see no evident failure of structural controls, but rather, considerable evidence of cohesive, structural integrity.

When Erich Fromm (1973) reviewed Freud's theory of aggressions in his own masterwork, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, he called into question Freud's linkage of a death instinct with the phenomena of destructiveness and the repetition compulsion. He argued that the tendency of life to return into inorganic form—whatever its merits as a biological theory—need have no obvious connection to aggression as the means to that end. What began as a theory of biological entropy is made to link up with a separate theory of



negative affects and behaviors. Fromm himself attempted to distinguish between two types of aggression, a distinction he felt lacking both in Freud's theory and in the later ethobiological theories of Konrad Lorenz and others who sought a biological basis for human destructiveness. Fromm contrasted "defensive, benign aggression," which he felt included the self preservative reactions to external danger—and which ceases when the threat ceases—and "malignant aggression," characterized by destructiveness and cruelty unconnected to any biologically adaptive purposes.

For Fromm, malignant aggression is rooted in specific pathological character types and is thus not the expression of any underlying universal drive or biologically programmed tendency to death and destruction. Character, in Fromm's usage, is a particularly *human*, as opposed to animal, characteristic, requiring social interaction, culture and, above all, language in the service of defining and transmitting symbols, values and ideas. It is organized around the pursuit of our specifically human goals and is not simply in the service of managing our impulses. If Freud conceived of the drives as linking us to our biological, animal heritage, Fromm saw character as that which makes us distinctly human.

Disorders of character, therefore, result not in the unleashing of our biologically primitive lust and aggression, but rather in the manifestations of malignant aggression that is found only in humans. War, in particular, was seen by Fromm as a quintessentially human activity, resulting from the instrumental use of aggression to further the characterologically determined needs of the individuals and groups involved. Thus, he wrote, "The first World War was motivated by economic interests and the ambitions of the political, military, and industrial leaders on both sides, and not by a need of the various nations to give vent to their dammed up aggression" (p. 211). To seek an explanation of war at the level of drives rather than character would amount to an unjustified act of psychological reductionism, losing sight of just what makes war the human phenomenon it is.

Fromm placed narcissism, not aggression, at the center of the character pathologies leading to war. Anticipating Kohut, Fromm sought to expand our understanding of the dynamics of narcissism beyond, as he said, "the realm of psychotics and infants," to include those defensive maneuvers at all levels of development concerned with the maintenance of self-esteem. Unlike Kohut, who would describe a line of normal narcissistic development, Fromm saw narcissism as intrinsically defensive in its attempts to shore up one's failing sense of self in the face of inner emptiness. Fromm's version of narcissism manifests itself in the form of greed—by which we seek to fill up an inner emptiness by an exaggerated focus on our own experience, body, or possessions—as opposed to a fulfillment of our biological or social needs, those actually necessary to maintain life. Fromm called greed "a non-instinctual passion" and saw its confusion with legitimate self-interest as one of the roots of the character disorders and interpersonal conflict. His focus is on the defensive operations that arise in response to the inner deadness of the narcissistic personality, namely, the characteristic ways in which others are manipulated to maintain one's own fragile sense of self-esteem and how greed is used in the attempt to fill up the empty inner self. Evil is, for Fromm, however, still a matter of psychopathology. The shift from Freud is from a pathology of uncontrolled drives to a pathology of interpersonal exploitation in the service of maintaining narcissistic equilibrium.

Kohut (1977), like Fromm, saw aggression as noninstinctual, but stressed that it always arose in response to narcissistic injury. He emphasized its re-





active, rather than its manipulative nature, and sought out the underlying healthy narcissistic needs which had been frustrated. Kohut also introduced the concept of compensatory structure, in contrast to defensive structure, to describe how the rehabilitation of structural defects in the self may come about. In so doing, I believe he opened the door for a new theory of structuralized evil, one no longer tied to a theory of aggression.

Rather than merely covering over a defect in the self, as do defensive structures, for Kohut, compensatory structure "brings about the functional rehabilitation of the self by making up for the weakness in one pole of the self through the strengthening of the other pole. Most frequently a weakness in the area of exhibitionism and ambitions is compensated for by the self-esteem provided by the pursuit of ideals" (pp. 3–4). We should note that Kohut's use of the concept of psychic structure within the framework of his psychology of the self involves a gradual shift in emphasis away from how structure had been used in drive-based models. In particular, he is shifting away from a notion of structure in which the predominant functions are the containment and management of primitive wishes and intense affects toward a definition focusing on the stability of a person's subjective experience of themselves as "whole and continuous, of being fully alive and vigorous, or of being balanced and organized" (Kohut, 1984, p. 77). Atwood and Stolorow (1984) carried this redefinition further by stressing that "psychological structures are not to be viewed simply as 'internalizations' or mental replicas of interpersonal events. Nor should they be regarded as having an objective existence in physical space or somewhere in a 'mental apparatus.' Instead we conceptualize these structures as systems of ordering or organizing principles through which a person's experiences of self and other assume their characteristic forms and meanings" (pp. 33–34).

Kohut, in discussing how compensatory structure could come about, focused on only two opportunities: the first in early childhood, when the child may turn to a second parent for the emotional support that was unavailable from the first (typically an opportunity to idealize one parent following the failure to be adequately mirrored by the other), and later as an adult during psychoanalysis. He referred to "transmuting internalization" as the process whereby positive aspects of the transference relationship, in the face of optimal frustration, become transformed into the structural capacities for self-soothing, maintenance of self-esteem, and a stable sense of self-identity, typically involving the consolidation of a mature set of values and ideals.

However, in his choice of the word "ideals" to describe this aspect of compensatory structure, Kohut skewed our perception about the possible range in the content of our ideals. Because he was concentrating on how positive idealized transference relationships come to be internalized as psychic structure, the focus was naturally to see them in terms of positive, life-enhancing values. "Ideals" become the concretization in intrapsychic terms of the interpersonal, transference process of "idealization." But we must bear in mind that the concept of compensatory structure is one that is purely *functional* in terms of how self-esteem and self-cohesion are maintained, and this function, I propose, may be brought about in a much broader variety of ways than Kohut considered. The alternative is not simply a matter of envisioning the process of structuralization around a nidus of internalized bad objects as opposed to good ones. We must look at how systems of meaning that may derive from a variety of cultural and historical sources get incorporated into a person's experience of how their life is taking shape.

There is no doubt in my mind that compensatory structure can be built



up in a wide range of nonanalytic situations. The combination of discipline, ongoing commitment, and a culturally value-laden context may come together (as they do in psychoanalytic practice) to produce opportunities in adult life for the coalescence of a coherent system of ambitions, skills, and values that add up to a vigorous, productive life, with an experience of the self as an active ongoing center of initiative. Disciplines as diverse as the military, the monastic, and the artistic are all commonly known to be, in one sense or another, "character building" in a way that I think accurately reflects their potential for laying down compensatory structure. In addition, transference-laden mentor relationships have, I believe, historically functioned to permit the transmission of skills and values in a way that genuinely contributes to the building of psychic structure, even without the enhancement that genetic interpretations add to this process within the analytic setting.

Finally, we should note that the adoption of or conversion to a strong set of ideals or beliefs—regardless of their content—is subjectively experienced as self-enhancing. Having a comprehensive system of meaning onto which to map one's ongoing experience seems to be an essential part of the experience of a stable sense of self. The adoption of a common set of values by persons widely divergent in their range of preexistent psychic structure or level of development is an indication of the highly generalized role a coherent set of values can play in organizing one's subjective experience. The function of values is not reducible to the symbolic meaning of the infantile wishes seemingly latent in the content of those values. In terms of their function in maintaining a stable sense of self, the values of a Catholic, a Democrat, an artist, and a Nazi may be dynamically identical. The choice of content is as subject to cultural and historical opportunity as it is reflective of individual development.

Of course, we should also be clear that merely fervent espousal of a belief does not imply that the laying down of compensatory structure is taking place. The intense, fanatical beliefs of political ideologues and religious cultists, for instance, most likely involve a defensive self-stimulation that is centered on the intensity of the belief, and is analogous dynamically to an addiction, in which repeated self-stimulation temporarily wards off deadness, but does nothing to establish a secure sense of self in its place. There is undoubtedly an admixture of the defensive and the structure building in the development of most belief systems, and it is probably not profitable to attempt to assay their proportions at a distance as when we look at historical figures. My main point, however, is that the *content* of the belief system is our *least* reliable guide to its dynamic function, and I will maintain that that "evil" content may serve dynamic structure-building functions as equally well as those that we have been more comfortable with calling "ideals" in Kohut's sense. At the same time we must bear in mind that a fully cohesive self, one that would never have to rely on any form of defensive stimulation, is a goal rarely achieved, regardless of the firmness of a system of ambitions and ideals. The life of Martin Luther King, whose compulsive need for sexual adventures throughout a career of intense religious and political conviction left him open to continual harassment and blackmail by the FBI (cf. Oates, 1982), provides what appears to be an example of a combination of unresolved defensive needs and partially realized compensatory structure.

When we look at examples of evil, I believe we will find some, like Adolf Hitler, whose behavior can be clearly explained in terms of their psychopathology as traditionally conceived. With others, of whom I will offer Henry Kissinger as the paradigmatic example, what we see is not so much overt



psychopathology, but rather a cohesive well-functioning self structure, one which I call the "evil self," in which a malignant value system serves as the center of a successfully functioning system of compensatory structure so that no diagnosis of gross psychopathology is warranted.

The case of Adolf Hitler would seem to epitomize the identity of evil with extreme psychopathology. By usual clinical standards he was markedly disturbed throughout his life. From childhood he displayed an inability to get along with his peers, was an isolated, fantasy-obsessed youth who never was able to apply himself successfully to any kind of studies, but who nonetheless harbored persistent grandiose notions of being a great artist or architect. He was intensely self-absorbed and narcissistic, obsessively concerned with issues of cleanliness and contamination, centered first on a fear of syphilis and later expanded to a hatred of anyone deemed impaired, defective or impure, most notably the Jews. There is evidence to suggest his sexual relations were grossly impaired and probably of a sadomasochistic nature. And most especially he fed his increasingly manic grandiosity with enactments of wholesale revenge and destruction.

It is worth noting two distinctly different approaches to the etiology of Hitler's psychopathology: those of Fromm (1973) and Alice Miller (1984). For Fromm, there is simply no evidence to suggest that any unusually monstrous parents or infantile trauma were responsible for Hitler's character. Rather, historical and cultural factors converged to allow Hitler to see his personal failures and humiliations mirrored in Germany's humiliation after the first World War; his special gift as a demagogue was his ability to engage others in his fantasies of blame and revenge, and to eventually make reality conform to his delusion. Here we see ideology taking on the powerful driving force of an addiction, the narcissistic equilibrium of the individual and the group sustained by ever-increasing doses of violence and hatred. Even with Hitler, however, we must assume that his effectiveness as a leader reflects a certain degree of self-cohesion brought about by the absolute certainty afforded to him by his ideology.

Miller approaches Hitler's biography quite differently. She attempts to tell his story in a way that exemplifies her theory of child abuse as the source of all psychopathology. For her, it is quite literally a case of the sins of the fathers being visited on their sons. She sees covertly sadistic childrearing practices—what she has called "poisonous pedagogy"—as passing on from generation to generation a legacy of abuse, denial, and repetition.

Citing examples from hundreds of years of the standard German texts on childrearing and on advice to parents—including one written by the father of Schreber—she notes a recurrent emphasis on taming the child's willful behavior and on the necessity of breaking children as one would a wild horse to ensure that parents successfully instill obedience and reasonableness in their charges.

According to Miller, the child exposed to such practices, in order to maintain any positive bond to the parent, must undergo a massive denial of the effects of this abuse and often a repression of the memory of its occurrence. She posits that a defensive idealization of the parents is instituted as a barrier to the child's rage at the abuse. Acquiescing in the notion that the suppression of the child's feelings is a necessary part of childrearing enables the parent to maintain the repression of the memory of his/her own abuse as a child.

Miller thus attempts to substitute a nearly universal legacy of parental abuse for Freud's drive-based models of innate aggression and destructiveness. Her thesis, however, is dangerously prone to circular reasoning. All adult



destructiveness is considered proof of earlier parental abuse. The absence of any memory or corroborating evidence of the abuse is merely further proof of the child's need to repress it and substitute a defensive idealized picture of the parents. In approaching Hitler, therefore, it is a forgone conclusion that she cannot accept any portrait of the parents other than as covert tyrants. Indeed, she concludes that the institution of concentration camps precisely mirrors the treatment Hitler must have received from his parents and passed along in revenge to others. Ultimately she concludes, "The fact that Hitler had so many enthusiastic followers proves that they had a similar personality structure to his, i.e. that they had a similar upbringing" (p. viii).

Here, I believe Miller approaches self-parody in the circularity of her logic and demonstrates the problem of presuming a priori that all evil behavior is identical with a given psychopathology, which in turn is the result of a specific pattern of childhood trauma. No counter evidence is conceivable and the conclusion is preordained by the hypothesis.

However, it is precisely the evident disjuncture of evil from any regular pattern of character or causality that has led it to be the mystery it is, and which compelled so many others to postulate hypotheses ranging from original sin to a biological predisposition to aggression in an attempt to explain both its ubiquity and its many guises.

Hannah Arendt's (1965) famous description of "the banality of evil," in reference to Adolf Eichmann, highlighted precisely this overwhelming discrepancy between an all too ordinary, unmonstrous character and the enormity of his evil deeds. Eichmann was no Hitler, motivated by almost indescribably boundless pathological narcissism and hatred. Rather, Eichmann presents the dilemma of a seemingly ordinary, if rather obsessive character, whose identity hinged on being a loyal, obedient servant of his party, one whose greatest satisfaction comes from following orders without question, to the best of his ability. He reported that his conscience would have bothered him "only if he had not done what he had been ordered to—to ship millions of men, women and children to their death with great zeal and meticulous care" (p. 25). Eichmann was appalling precisely in his bland normality. One psychiatrist, confounded by this paradox, reportedly called Eichmann "more normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him" (p. 25). To insist on the presence of massive but hidden violence and pathology in such a man as Eichmann is precisely to sidestep the moral dilemma that he poses.

For an equally chilling example of the disjunction of psychopathology and evil, I would like to propose the contemporary example of Henry Kissinger. Indeed, I will suggest that Kissinger epitomizes what I call an "evil self," a self whose structural integrity is based on ambitions and ideals whose execution functions to maintain the cohesiveness of the individual with complete efficiency, but which by their operation wreaks havoc in the lives of others.

Henry Kissinger came to the United States in 1938, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. As a youth he was subject to beatings and harassment by anti-Semitic peers, and forced to leave his regular school to attend one of all Jewish students. His father was a schoolteacher who was professionally ostracized and finally forced to resign his position. Kissinger, however, has consistently minimized the effects all this had on him. He said, "I was not consciously unhappy . . . For children these things are not so serious. It is fashionable now to explain everything psychoanalytically, but let me tell you, the political persecutions of my childhood are not what control my life" (Landau, 1972, p. 14). However, out of this experience of childhood chaos and powerlessness





emerged a man devoted to maintaining the balance of order between nations—at whatever the cost.

Throughout his life Kissinger has displayed some of the hallmarks of narcissistic vulnerability, what one biographer has characterized as a "combination of arrogance and insecurity, of outward insolence compounded with internal self-doubt . . . He was quick to feel insulted and quick to wound others in turn" (Landau, 1972, p. 83). And yet, overall, the picture that emerges, even from such unashamedly hostile biographers as David Landau and William Shawcross, is one of an immensely effective, accomplished diplomat and intellectual, whose personal strengths are undeniable. Landau, who violently opposes everything Kissinger stands for politically, admits that "his drive and ambition were accompanied by unfeigned personal warmth," and his intellect appeared joined "with human decency and genuine good will" (p. 82). He is at pains to insist that Kissinger's policies cannot be attributed to any gross character defect; Dr. Kissinger is not reducible to Dr. Strangelove. Again, quoting Landau, "Kissinger is not a man who blindly seeks power. For us to see him that way would be as fruitless and wrongheaded as it would be unjustified, because to approach the man so simplistically does not permit us to understand his relentless self-confidence or enable us to grasp his remarkable inner personal fortitude . . . It is true that he has an unusual impulse to power and authority, but it is an impulse that springs from a strong sense of personal mission and intellectual self-duty" (pp. 23–24).

I would suggest that this is a portrait of a man who, initially suffering from an underlying defect in his sense of self, has been able, as the result of his life experience—including two apparently very significant positive mentor experiences in the Army and later at Harvard—to establish a substantial degree of compensatory structure, in the form of cohesive ambitions and ideals, so as to represent, if not a paradigm of mental health, at least a well-functioning, confident and capable individual able to enact a life plan without interference from the intrusion of any gross symptomatology.

Yet look at the nature of the values that consolidate this particular cohesive self. Kissinger has throughout his career placed the diplomatic maintenance of the balance of power as his first priority. Order is to be maintained through negotiations between pragmatic leaders, trading off various self-interests to conserve the overall order. In this system the greatest danger comes from the ideologue or the charismatic leader who threatens the conservative "gentleman's agreement" with revolutionary fervor. This anti-ideological stance has the virtue of great flexibility—it is what allowed Kissinger to renegotiate diplomatic ties with China after years of isolation of that country because of the Cold War anti-Communist quarantine. However, it has also led to a focus on balancing the spheres of influence of the superpowers, while devaluing the nationalist or anticolonial sentiments of emerging countries, whose importance is reduced to that of pawns in the overall international chess game. Once stability is defined as the preeminent goal of international affairs, there is an implicit justification of any means necessary to maintain it—conventional morality as well as ideology can too easily be discarded. Order takes priority over justice.

It is worth remembering that Kissinger first rose to national attention as the author of *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (1957), a book that argued in favor of the use of tactical nuclear weapons by the United States in order to maintain its superior position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Kissinger's policies have, in the name of pragmatism, always espoused the free use of exactly what



Fromm called "instrumental violence"—the willingness to wage war to achieve the nation's goals.

In *Sideshow* (1979) William Shawcross demonstrates in frightening detail the results of Kissinger's policies in Cambodia. Prince Norodom Sihanouk had, since 1941, managed to steer a course of nonalignment for his country throughout a period of increasing political polarization in Southeast Asia. His neutrality was anathema to Kissinger, who sought to draw Cambodia into the American sphere of influence as a further staging area for operations against the North Vietnamese, but also as a way to bolster the appearance of America's commitment to the region, regardless of the consequences for the local population. The bombing of Cambodian targets by American planes, done under complete secrecy and without Congressional knowledge or approval, was initiated first under the guise of attacking a supposed North Vietnamese/Viet Cong command center from which attacks against the South were directed, and later under a more generalized notion of interdicting North Vietnamese troop movements near the border. No command post was ever located. The effect of literally thousands of bombing missions, however, was to massively disrupt the civilian population and to drive the enemy troops deeper into the heart of the country, eventually completely destroying the national economy and social fabric. It was estimated that by 1971 the bombing had made refugees of more than two million of the country's seven million people. Sihanouk's neutral regime was deposed and replaced by that of Lon Nol, who was committed to Washington's anti-Communist policies. Shawcross quotes one American official as likening the effect of the American intervention in Cambodia to the arrival of a 25-foot shark in a backyard swimming pool of children who cannot escape.

The attempt to keep the extent of the bombing secret led Kissinger to order extensive wiretaps, both on his own staff and on reporters, although Shawcross describes how his role in the greatest abuses of Watergate was minimized by a Congress and press eager to preserve the image of Kissinger as elder statesman while the Nixon presidency was collapsing. Similarly, the whole question of the illegality of the Cambodian invasion was eventually deleted from the articles of impeachment voted on by the House in an attempt to secure bipartisan support in Congress, thus further distancing Kissinger from Nixon's crimes and eventual fall. Perhaps the final Orwellian irony lies in Kissinger's 1973 reception of the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the Paris Peace agreements. According to Shawcross, this is the same man who, under strict interpretation of international law, could be found guilty of war crimes for planning the wholesale indiscriminate killing of the civilian population of Cambodia.

If Eichmann's trial provided us with an example of how a seemingly ordinary man could commit war crimes under the guise of just following orders, Kissinger needs to be recognized as a new paradigm for the one who gives the orders. War crimes need not originate with a demagogic madman who somehow casts his spell over a country. Rather, the evil self may manifest itself as an eminently respectable, highly principled individual, whose very lack of those frenzied, histrionic qualities we normally associate with a Hitler or a Quaaadafi blinds us to his destructive potential.

The example of Kissinger also raises problems for those, like Kohlberg (1981), who have attempted to relate moral development to the development of abstract cognitive abilities, although Kohlberg has, of course, acknowledged the evident discrepancy that all too often seems to occur when evidently smart people do not "live up" morally to the level that their cognitive capacities seem



to allow. Even the capacity for empathy, which should be a major moral developmental achievement, can be used for evil purposes, as Kohut (1981) himself acknowledged. Kohut cited the Nazis' capacity for empathy in devising the "buzz-bombs" they knew would incite terror in their victims.

Robert Coles (1986) has criticized the Kohlberg model with a counterexample from the opposite end of the developmental spectrum. He cites the case of Ruby, a 6-year-old black girl who, in the face of abusive heckling and threatening mobs, went ahead and attended her classes at a previously all-white New Orleans elementary school. By no clinical standard, according to Coles, could Ruby be said to possess the capacities for abstract reasoning, role-playing, and reversibility that Kohlberg describes as the prerequisite for genuine principled morality. Coles reported that Ruby herself credited her church-going experience with her courageous behavior. She said, "I go to church every Sunday, and we're told to pray for everyone, even the bad people, and so I do . . . The minister says that if I forgive the people and smile at them and pray for them, God will keep a good eye on everything and He'll be our protection."

I think Kohlberg errs on the side of viewing morality and values too much as a product of *individual* development, and fails to account for the ways in which a variety of social, historical and religious factors come into play in terms of what is offered by circumstances from which to construct our ideals. The dynamics of structure building are all too neutral in their acceptance of whatever is at hand—whether it be the Christian principles Ruby's church made available or the Nazi ideology Eichmann found to coalesce his emerging self-development. The adoption of Nazi values does not, as Alice Miller has argued, imply a common developmental trauma for all the Germans of that generation, any more than Ruby's courage implies a unique family constellation in her case. Coles is at pains to assure us that Ruby's courage was not reducible to any unique psychodynamic pattern arising out of her family life that might distinguish her from her peers. Rather, the fortuitous conjunction of family, religious upbringing, and the onset of an historical crisis provided her with the opportunity to put latent beliefs into action and to consolidate them into genuine, structuralized ideals, capable of sustaining her will and managing her anxieties in the face of her tormentors. In a similar way, I do not think it is especially profitable to scrutinize the preexistent psychodynamics of such geniuses as Jung or Heidegger, who came, at least temporarily, to accommodate their intellect to Nazi ideology, in the expectation of finding latent, unresolved conflicts around aggression or sadism. Rather, we must sadly note that the opportunity to feel swept up in the rush of history is an exhilarating, self-enhancing experience that structurally offers reinforcement to compensatory self-structure, as well as defensive self-stimulation, whether the movement is in the promotion of racial superiority or in resistance to it. For most of us, it is a matter of chance, or grace, by which tide we are swept up, and what traditions are available to nurture our growth. I fear that the self is genuinely neutral in its ability to take in a range of sustenance, whether for good or evil.

I am not prepared, however, to lapse into an ethical relativity and assume that whatever promotes structuralization of the self is by definition good. Structuralization of the self should, rather, merely be one of our criteria for mental health, which I hope I have shown with these examples to be not synonymous with moral health, or with the good.

It is the broader definition of good to which I now wish to turn. To do so, I will propose that we first of all need to shift our perspective away from the



individual, whom I have attempted to show can function perfectly well at the level of a separate individual, but nonetheless be organized around evil ideals. The distinction between good and evil I wish to draw, therefore, will hinge not on individual functioning, intrapsychically, but on how that individual functions as part of a larger whole.

Winnicott's (1975) famous aphorism, "there is no such thing as an infant," offers an introduction to a more systemic perspective. For clearly the baby's needs and the mother's needs must be met in harmony. Both mother and infant have developmental needs that must be met. It is not simply a matter of the child needing adequate caretaking in order to grow. The mother also has the opportunity to mature in her caregiving role and to add depth and purpose to her own sense of self. The mother's chances to grow as a mother may be as hazy at risk by a failure of the dyad to thrive as are the baby's.

The mother-baby dyad offers a fairly straightforward model of how roles must be properly played out in tandem for each individual to thrive. But as the system expands to include the larger family unit, and then the family within the social fabric of the community, our sense of how the various roles should unfold gets progressively hazier. One contemporary critic of our modern ethical dilemmas, Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), has asserted the difficulty lies precisely in the modern habit of viewing morals and ethics as problems of individual behavior—as if ethics automatically meant what rules we use to sort out the claims of separate, competing individuals. Rather, he suggests, the problem lies in our conception of ourselves as individuals, resigned to that hazy overview of the larger systems of which we are a part. It need not be, he suggests, a forgone conclusion that individual needs are always clear, while the larger picture is inevitably vague and inconclusive. MacIntyre contrasts our predicament with the ethical schema of classical Greece in the time of Aristotle. In particular he argues that the concept of "virtue" for the ancient Greeks predates the proscriptive codes of ethics—superego ethics, we might say—that we take for granted as moderns. For Aristotle (1976), a "good man" was not simply a man who didn't break any laws or moral codes, but rather a man who was most fully a man. A man can be good in the way that we say that a musician or craftsman is good, if he is completely fulfilling his functions in the broadest sense as a man. And in Aristotle's schema that function is never solitary, never a matter of personal well-being or happiness, but is always communal, social, and political. A good man is one who fulfills his roles, whatever they might be, within the family, the economy, and the larger city-state. In the classical model, it would be unthinkable to conceive of a moral way to maximize individual well-being somehow irrespective of, or at the expense of, the larger unity. The cultivation of the virtues of courage, friendship, self-restraint, wisdom and justice function not simply to enhance the individual but to promote the evolution and smooth functioning of society. All this hinges, as MacIntyre points out, on the assumption of a preexistent natural order, of which the city-state was seen as the inevitable manifestation.

The social order is here seen as analogous to the human body, with each member defined not only by individual properties, but in relation to the functioning of the whole. The moral imperative in such a schema always comes down to what promotes the best functioning of the whole body. For one organ to somehow be in competition with the others for an inordinate share of the body's nutrients is self-evidently counterproductive and provides the definition of evil. In fact, when one group of cells in the body multiplies without regard to anything but self-propagation, without regard for the overall functioning of the body, we call the result cancer.





This metaphor of the body is also found in the Bible (1 Cor 12:12–21): “A man’s body is all one, though it has a number of different organs, and all this multitude of organs goes to make up one body . . . If the ear should say, I am not the eye, and therefore I do not belong to the body, does it belong to the body any less for that? Where would the power of hearing be, if the body were all eye? Or the power of smell, if the body were all ear? As it is, God has given each one of them its own position in the body, as He would . . . The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee, or the head to the foot, I have no need of you.”

Whether morality arises as conformity to the natural order as in Aristotle’s model, or whether we are united as parts of God’s creation as in the Biblical model, MacIntyre points out that we are in a very different ethical universe from that of contemporary relativism, where we must seek to derive ethics either from a rational utilitarianism or, as Kohlberg ultimately sees it, as based on the individual’s capacity to achieve developmentally an appreciation of abstract ethical principles, such as justice. Kohlberg (1981) has discussed the existence of what he has called “a seventh stage” of religious development—beyond the rationally ultimate sixth stage of universal ethical principle—which would be characterized by what he called “a sense of connectedness between the individual human mind and heart and the larger cosmic whole or order” (p. 355). He cites the writings of Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, and Teilhard de Chardin as representatives from three different cultures, all articulating this mystical awareness of cosmic unity. What sets Kohlberg radically apart from any variety of religious or even classical tradition, however, is his resolute portrayal of such experiences as the culmination of the personal development of special individuals, not as the discovery by them of any essential fact about how the world is itself actually constituted. The unity is taken merely as an attribute of their individual consciousnesses, not as an attribute of the world. This is in absolute contradistinction to the Biblical passage that assures us that the eye or the ear—whether it knows it or not—is always functioning as part of the one body, and the existence of the body is not dependent on whether any of its parts ever achieves any so-called mystical awareness of its existence.

The problem for those who have not had this direct experience of participation in the one mystical body is that it seems to all come down to a matter of faith—something totally at odds with, or unavailable to, the scientifically trained skeptical heirs of Freud, who taught us to reduce all such beliefs either to infantile longings for merger or to their function as defenses in the service of denial of our mortality.

MacIntyre himself seems to end his study on such a note of despair—seeing modern man adrift in a new Dark Ages, awaiting, as he says, a new St. Benedict to reestablish the potential for faith. That the original St. Benedict is no longer good enough is a matter that might still be open for dispute, and the example of Robert Coles seems to show that it is possible to combine a sophisticated awareness of modern philosophy with psychoanalytic theory and remain nonetheless deeply religious.

Religious belief, in addition to unquestionably serving the defensive functions outlined by Freud, has traditionally provided a system of meaning or metaphor by which people have organized their individual experiences into a part of a patterned whole. Gregory and Mary Catherine Bateson (1987) have emphasized the anthropological function of religion in making men and women of all cultures aware of an overall “pattern that connects,” the underlying biological interdependence of all life. For example: “The Australian aborigine



had, in his totemic cosmology, a system that brought all the natural species and forces and human institutions, plants, and animals, wind and thunder, circumcision and the boomerang he used in hunting, into relationship and defined his place in that complex whole—and allowed him to use the sense of multiplicity in the decisions of his life. The European peasant in the Middle Ages went out to plow the fields in the presence of a great crowd (or cloud) of witnesses, patron saints and powers and principalities, and of course, angels. The truth that the aborigine and the peasant share is the truth of integration . . . For most human beings through history, the pattern which connected their individual lives to the complex regularity of the world in which they lived was a religion, an extended metaphor, which made it possible to think at levels of integrated complexity otherwise impossible" (pp. 195–196). Again, we see here a point of view in contradistinction to that of Kohlberg, in which complex ethical behavior is not the by-product simply of an individual's personal development, but the result of his/her participation or embeddedness in a complex cultural pattern of understanding.

It is this perception of unity, of identification of ourselves and others as coparticipants in a larger all-inclusive pattern, that finally allows us to distinguish good from evil, and to separate moral issues from the issues of mental health and particularly from questions regarding the eruption of containment of aggressive impulses. I would propose that the achievement of ideals based on an experience of unity constitutes the good. It is a task that we must face both at the individual and cultural level.

On the level of individual functioning, this awareness of our essential embeddedness in the world may be equivalent to an ever-broadening capacity to perceive others, and indeed eventually *all* others and *all* situations, as selfobjects. Developmental maturation may, in fact, be defined in terms of this movement from *selfobject specificity* (i.e., the capacity to use only a small number of others, who act in very specific ways in accordance with our subjectively perceived needs, as selfobjects) to *nonspecificity* (i.e., to experience a broad spectrum of others as confirming our sense of self). Ideals, of whatever variety, are principles by which we act and interact with others which give rise to selfobject connections.

Culturally, patterns of meaning, social and religious structures, must remain intact, available and emotionally relevant to the individual to permit the perception and experiencing of participation in the overall "pattern that connects." In diagnosing man's historic failure to live up to this potential, individually and culturally, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1963) has written, "In actual fact, we are suffering more from the distortion and underdevelopment of our deepest human tendencies than from a superabundance of animal instincts" (p. 22).

Disregard to our place in the larger whole leads to the particularly modern technological evils that result when we imagine that we can alter with impunity one factor in a system without regard to the disruptions in the balance of the whole that then results. This error, which is precisely a moral, and not merely a technical error is, for example, manifest in the mentality of our agricultural system that seeks to maximize crop yield through an unrestrained use of fertilizer and pesticide without regard to how the environment as a whole is being poisoned (cf Berry, 1977, 1987). It is the same type of error that leads a Kissinger to imagine that the bombing of civilians can have purely military results, without regard to the economic and cultural ripples that were set off and eventually swept away an entire nation. And it is the embeddedness in a religious system that taught her to pray for her enemies that enabled an



otherwise ordinary 6-year-old girl to display the moral courage that made her the ethical superior to that Harvard scholar, statesman, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Henry Kissinger.

Psychoanalysis in pursuit of a clinical neutrality and value-free scientific objectivity has presumed for too long that ethical and religious issues are ultimately reducible to problems of psychodynamics. In demonstrating the noncongruence of evil and psychopathology, or of good and mental health, as traditionally conceived, I hope that I have helped lead us away from future errors of this sort of reductionism.

## REFERENCES

- Arendt, H. (1965). *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (rev. ed.) New York: Viking.
- Aristotle, (1976). *Ethics*. (Thomson, trans.). New York: Penguin.
- Atwood, G., & Stolorow, R. (1984). *Structures of subjectivity*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Bateson, G., & Bateson, M. C. (1987). *Angels fear*. New York: Macmillan.
- Berry, W. (1977). *The unsettling of America*. San Francisco: Sierra Club.
- Berry, W. (1987). *Home economics*. San Francisco: North Point.
- Coles, R. (1986). *The moral life of children*. Boston: Atlantic.
- Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. London: Hogarth.
- Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its discontents*. London: Hogarth.
- Fromm, E. (1973). *The anatomy of human destructiveness*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Kissinger, H. (1957). *Nuclear weapons and foreign policy*. New York: Norton.
- Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Kohut, H. (1981, October 4). Address given at Progress in Self Psychology Conference, Berkeley, CA.
- Kohut, H. (1984). *How does analysis cure?* New York: International Universities Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1981). *The philosophy of moral development* (Vol. 1). New York: Harper & Row.
- Landau, D. (1972). *Kissinger: The uses of power*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame.
- Merton, T. (1963). *Life and holiness*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Miller, A. (1984). *For your own good*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Oates, S. (1982). *Let the trumpet sound: The life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Harper & Row.
- Shawcross, W. (1979). *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the destruction of Cambodia*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1975). *Through paediatrics to psycho-analysis*. New York: Basic Books.

