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"Industrialized Violence: The Origins of Genocide"

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"We are all of us, Christian and Jew alike of a generation and a tradition that has been brought up to believe that culture was the basis of salvation.
As George Steiner has often reminded us, we believed that if people read good books, went to museums, subscribed to the opera and loved symphonies, certain decencies would follow...Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Mai Lai have taught us that murder and culture do not exclude each other. If these events prove anything, it is that it is possible for a person to both love poems and kill children."-Lionel Rubinoff (Rubinoff, 1973).

The word "genocide" invokes many images. From the images of the Holocaust to

the pictures of recent ethnic cleansing shown on both the evening news and in other media

sources, our culture is constantly reminded of the destructiveness of our species.

Thousands of bodies, victims of mass violence, are seen in photos from wars the globe.

Human destructiveness and violence, in the form of genocide, has had a long history with

a basis in both sociology (culture/nurture) and in biology (nature). To better understand

the sociobiological implications of genocide, I will critically analyze, an overview on the

ethnic cleansing of the last century, several theories on the origins of violence and

destructiveness in humans, on genocide itself and, finally, coping with mass violence.

"We are all murderers and prostitutes-no matter to what culture, society, class, nation, we belong, no matter how normal, moral or mature we take ourselves to be.....In the last fifty years, we human beings have slaughtered by our own hands coming on for one hundred million of our species. We all live under the constant threat of our total annihilation. We seem to need death and destruction as much as life and happiness. We are as driven to kill and be killed as we are to let live and live,"-Dr. Ronald Laing (Laing, 1967).

In the last century, over one hundred million people (Charny, 1982) were

murdered in waves of genocidal extermination. For centuries, populations had been

decimated in wars; however, the 20th century saw the rise of calculated, industrial

exterminations of various targeted populations. For example, during the regime of the

Third Reich in Nazi Germany, millions of individuals were systematically butchered in

specialized concentration camps. Overall, by genocide, the killing of hostages, reprisal

raids, forced labor, 'euthanasia,' starvation, exposure, medical experiments, terror

bombing, and in the concentration and death camps, the Nazis murdered from about

15,000,000 to over 31,600,000 people, most likely closer to 21 million men, women,

handicapped, aged, sick, prisoners of war, forced laborers, camp inmates, critics,

homosexuals, Jews, Slavs, Serbs, Czechs, Italians, Poles, Frenchmen, Ukrainians, and so

on. Among them were 1 million children under eighteen years of age. In the later part of

the 20th century, the Iraqis were and still are relentlessly wiping out the Kurds. In

Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge wiped out millions of people in mass violence. In Africa, the

tall northern Sudanese massacred the black southern Sudanese. In Tibet, the Communist

Chinese government is slowly murdering thousands of Tibetans. In the Balkans, atrocities

against the Muslims by their Croatian and Serbian neighbors have been the nightmare of

Western Europe. On and on these examples are seen throughout the world.

> *"Aggression, hostility, strife, conflict, cruelty, sadism certainly all exist commonly and perhaps universally on the psychoanalytic couch, i.e., in fantasy, in dream, etc. I assume that aggressive behavior can be found in everyone as an actuality or a possibility. Where I see no aggressiveness at all, I suspect repression or suppression or self-control. I assume that the quality of aggression changes very markedly as on moves from psychological immaturity or neurosis up towards self-actualization or maturity, in that sadistic or cruel or mean behavior is a quality of aggression found in undeveloped or neurotic or immature people, but that as one moves towards personal maturity and freedom, the quality of this aggression changes into reactive or righteous indignation and into self-affirmation, resistance to exploitation and domination, passion for injustice, etc. "—Abraham H. Maslow (Maslow, 1968).*

What are the origins of human aggressiveness, violence, and destructiveness?

Explanations for human destructiveness and aggression have followed a multidisciplinary

course with input from the combined fields of anthropology, biology and psychology. The

proposed theories of the origins of aggression and violence can be divided into three main

schools of thought: 1.) Biological determinism; 2.) Cultural explanations for violence and

aggression; and 3.) Sociobiological explanations for violence and aggression.

Biological determinists, as the name implies, view the causes of aggression as biological (i.e. genetics, hormone levels, racial differences, differential "K" theory, etc.). Violence is viewed as a "disease", a prime example of psychopathology or as a racial defect. One example of a biological determinist explanation for aggression would be Dr. Fredrick Goodwin and his work with the now-defunct Federal Violence Initiative Project of the early 1990's. Goodwin, in this project, hypothesized that "genetic factors inclined human beings toward violence and suggested that one way to spot violence-prone individuals might be to look for biological markers of a violence-prone disposition," (Wright, 1995). Also, Goodwin, in the late 1970's, researched the influence of serotonin levels on violence in a study that involved service men that were being observed for psychiatric discharge from the armed forces (Wright, 1995). These serotonin levels were used in his later projects like the Federal Violence Initiative Project as a "biological marker" for being a violent or a violence-prone individual.

Another example of biological determinism would be the work of Dr. Philippe Rushton. Rushton is a proponent of the supposed biological differences between the "races" of humanity and much of his work focuses on the propensity of violence, among other things, that the different races supposedly have (Rushton, 1985). Rushton separated all the different ethnic groups of the world into three "races": Oriental, Whites or Caucasian, and Blacks or Negroes. Orientals, according to Rushton, were the most advanced with a low propensity for violence and Blacks were the lowest with a high propensity for violence and aggression. Both of these studies were inconclusive due to the

researchers' inability to rule out environmental factors, usage of dubious evidence, and the racially inflammatory conclusions that these theories hinted at.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are the cultural theories for why humans are sometimes violent or aggressive. Cultural theories maintain that aggression is primarily a learned behavior that is reinforced by culture and its agents (i.e. government, schools, media, and religion). Violence is viewed in a more humanitarian perspective. Violence is a "natural" response of normal person to a particular social environment. For instance, the vicarious learning or social learning research done by Albert Bandura, a psychologist who specialized in behaviorism, in the 1960's and 1970's is a prime example of this cultural theory school of thought. Bandura did a study involving young school children watching violent programs on television. From his extensive study, Bandura found that many of the children who watched the violent programs would mimic the violent behaviors that they witnessed in the television programs on toys or other children in the study playroom (Bandura, 1986). Whereas, the biological determinists (nature) give undue emphasis on the medical causes of violence, the culturalists (nurture) also overemphasize the role of culture on behavior. This is best represented in a statement by Paul Billings, who was a clinical geneticist at Stanford, "We know what causes violence in our society: poverty, discrimination, the failure of our educational system. It's not the genes that cause violence in our society. It's our social system" (Kevles and Kevles, 1997). Margaret Mead also has written about the media influence on violent behavior. Mead believes that violent behavior is caused by the mass media's celebration of violence. Publicity has become a sort of sanction where violent behavior that has been forbidden in the past is now expected. This

change in public attitudes, she further hypothesizes, makes violent behavior possible (Mead, 1969).

Finally, there is the third school of thought that represents the sociobiological theories of violence and aggression. This viewpoint is between the preceding two polar opposites of the spectrum. Sociobiologists believe that it is the combination of both biology and culture that makes violent behavior possible in humans. Examples of this theoretical standpoint include the work of evolutionary psychologists, the work of Israel W. Charny and the studies of Stanley Milgram.

Evolutionary psychologists share some of the characteristics of their biological determinist counterparts: genes, evolutionary theory, neurotransmitters, etc. are valid explanations for explaining violence. However, evolutionary psychologists also incorporate the culturists' view that violence is also greatly influenced and shaped by the environment that the individual lives in while keeping in mind the influence of human nature.

Dr. Israel Charny, a clinical psychologist and proponent of sociobiological theory in regards to violent behavior, conducted an in-depth analysis of genocide and violence. Charny theorizes that it is the combination of unconscious and biological drives of fear of annihilation and of the unknown in conjunction with environmental factors that make humans more likely to commit acts of aggression and violence. Charny compares violence, especially genocide, to the human disease of cancer. Violence, he states, resembles cancer cells. We all contain the potential for cancer, but there are many different triggers that either bring it out or let it rest dormant within us (Charny, 1982).

Finally, there was the research done by psychologist Stanley Milgram during the aftermath of WWII. This study was done to see to what extent that people would obey leaders and engage in violent or aggressive behaviors. This study was conducted in the United States and a follow-up was conducted in Europe. The studies consisted of individuals coming in to a room and were told by a person in a lab coat to administer shocks to the person who was strapped in the room. The results were startling. When a person who represented authority was giving the orders about 85% complied with giving the maximum level of shocks that was supposedly to administer a deathblow to the actor that was strapped to the chair. When there wasn't an "authority figure" present, the results were still about 31% compliance. Milgram concluded that people were both inherently violent and conditioned towards aggression and compliance to authority. From these three viewpoints on the origins of violence and aggression, it can be concluded that all humans have the potential for violent behavior and environmental factors, especially culture, mold and condition this potential (Milgram, 1965).

"I recognize in my children potential parricides as I recognize in myself a potential infanticide-especially when the going gets rough. I am keenly aware of those drives which, under radically altered conditions of living, could elicit from me the behavior of a Nazi Gauleiter or SS man. I have no illusions about human nature"—Rabbi Alan Miller (Miller, 1967).

What does the word genocide mean? This search for a definition has been very controversial. On December 9, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Genocide Convention, incorporating the following definition of genocide in Article II:

"In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" (Chalk, 1994).

This narrow definition of the victim groups was the result of a political compromise to keep Russia and Great Britain from walking out of the Genocide Convention because, as their delegates argued, including "political and other groups" would weaken the article. This narrow definition served its purpose for the international lawyers and the international community that was trying to make sense of the aftermath of the Holocaust. However, since 1944, several alternative definitions have surfaced. Among the most important are the definitions proposed by Pieter N. Drost, Irving Louis Horowitz, and Helen Fein.

In 1959, Pieter N. Drost, a Dutch law professor wrote a critical analysis of the UN Genocide Convention. Drost argued that by excluding political and other groups from the definition would leave a loophole that would allow the world's governments free rein to persecute political groups and other groups that did not fit this inadequate definition.

Drost redefined genocide as "the deliberate destruction of physical life of individual human

beings by reason of their membership of any human collectivity as such," (Drost, 1959).

Others argued that the definition of proposed by the Convention was a tool of law and

ethics and not a good definition for sociologist and anthropologists. In 1976, Irving Louis

Horowitz, a sociologist, added to the UN definition that genocide was "a structural and

systematic destruct of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus," (Chalk, 1994).

Horowitz went on to hypothesize that national culture plays a more important role in the

occurrence of genocide than the ideology of state (i.e. a totalitarian government) and the

decision to eradicate groups by mass violence is more influenced by culture. Finally, in the

1980's, Helen Fein focused attention on the developing of a definition that would reflect

the broader and deeper sociological implications of genocide. She defined genocide as:

"Genocide is sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a

collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social

reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat

offered by the victim," (Chalk, 1994). Fein's definition included political and other groups

but excluded deaths resulting from warfare. These new expansions of the definition have

caused much confusion and controversy. Political scientists argue that these definitions are

too broad and have lead to the abuse of the term genocide. Anthropologists and other

social scientists, however, maintain that these definitions are crucial to understanding the

concept of genocide.

How does genocide happen? There are no clear-cut answers to this question

but there are several theories to why genocide occurs. Two explanations that I found to be

very helpful to understanding this came from a book by Peter Zuckerman and a book by

Israel Charny. Peter Zuckerman, a survivor of the Holocaust and sociologist, writes about

his experiences in the book, "Beyond the Holocaust, Survival or Extinction?". Zuckerman

blames political mismanagement and militarism as the ultimate cause of the Holocaust and

of genocide in general. Zuckerman explains that once an analysis and summary is made of

the causes of the Holocaust, the common pattern emerges. **The political leaderships of**

the various countries involved made an incredibly large number of mistakes and

blunders. Short-term gains were favored, at the expense of foresight and planning. Driven

by a need to assert themselves to gain and retain power, the politicians and other power

holders totally mismanaged the external affairs and foreign relations of their countries. In

this they were aided and abetted by the war institutions and military forces. In fact, the

political leaderships and the militaries reinforced each other. Political mismanagement

caused the wasting of national resources in colonial rivalries, which in turn resulted in on-

going diplomatic crises. After each of these confrontations it was deemed necessary to

enlarge the armies and navies. In some countries the military was used to keep political

control over subject nationalities and other oppressed minorities. After major crises -- like

losing World War I -- existing political leadership became discredited, and new forms of

political misleaders came in power. Thus, communism emerged in Russia, and fascism in

Italy and Germany. Democratic forces continued to lose out to totalitarianism, until,

finally, World War II caused the supreme confrontation. Throughout these chaotic events

science and technology was misapplied to the development of increasingly lethal weapons

and armaments, including the ultimate weapon -- the atomic bombs that exploded over

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Genocide, in the 20th century, is the result of the massive

technological advances of the Industrial Age in conjunction with the political

mismanagement of the "modern" nations that rose during this period in history. Add the inherent potential for violent and aggressive behavior in humans and the path to genocide is inevitable according to Zuckerman. Zuckerman also proposed other main reasons for the Holocaust that can also be used to explain most of the comparative acts of genocide in the last century: 1.) Generating enmity to gain and to maintain political power—this is a political technique used to consolidate the "in-group" against the "out-group"; 2.) Scapegoat the out-group to shift the blame of military and political ineptitude; 3.) The dehumanization of humanity through modern warfare; and 4.) Greed (Zuckerman, 1996).

Dr. Israel Charny, a clinical psychologist and proponent of sociobiological theory in regards to violent behavior, conducted an in-depth analysis of genocide and violence in his book, " How Can We Commit the Unthinkable?" (Charny, 1982). Genocide, Charny theorizes, is the result of a mixture of unconscious biological and psychological drives combined with the mismanagement of our cultural agents (i.e. religion, politics, economics, etc.). Charny states that this mixture of unconscious biological and psychological drives include: the collective will and humanity's fear of death and the sacrificing of others to the death that we fear ourselves.

Charny states that as a rule, individuals are part of society. They interact not only with each other's wills, but also with the will of society: the collective will. In the simplest case, the collective will is a simple sum of individual wills direct at a common goal. In that case, an individual can observe his will contributing to the expression of the collective will, and can thus recognize his contribution to the achievement of the common goal. This is a very simple situation characteristic of small groups. The collective will manifests itself

explicitly in all functions performed by the state: foreign defense, the maintenance of order, the regulation of will exchange, etc. Interactions with the collective will often pass unnoticed. Nevertheless, the collective will exerts a strong influence on an individual. Public opinion, traditional life-styles, prejudices, good manners, and the nature of traditional hierarchies are all manifestations of society's collective will. It is this collective will that demands submission on the part of an individual, in the form of respect for customs, obeying various norms of conduct, etc. The collective will manipulated by a strong-willed leader is a powerful operator in making genocide possible.

The next reason that Charny believes that genocide can happen is that humans ultimately fear death and that they ultimately seek to project onto one another this ultimate fear. "When we find ourselves edging toward the precipice of nothingness and face the prospect of time ceasing to exist, we are filled with a deep, horrifying terror. Much of what we know as anxiety in our everyday lives is an echo of this terror of death's nothingness. Is there any more powerful demand than a human being's crying out, 'I don't want to die?'," (Charny, 1982). In-groups of a population, he hypothesizes, project this fear onto members of the out-group of that particular population and in turn sacrifice the out-group to protect themselves from their ultimate fate. These two drives combined provide the conscious illusion of self-defense in a population that is committing genocide and makes genocide a viable "final solution" in other populations.

"I came home a little afraid for my country, afraid of what it might want and get, and like, under pressure of combined reality and illusion. I felt—and feel—that it was no German Man that I had met, but Man. He happened to be in Germany under certain conditions. He might, under certain conditions, be I"—Milton Mayer (Mayer, 1966).

How can genocide be prevented? This is a complex question to which there is really no clear answer. However, Charny and Zuckerman both agree that once we understand and accept the reality of our predicament, we are along the road of its avoidance. At this stage, the main obstacle is a human failing -- the tendency of *denial.* "Many Americans -- raised in an optimistic culture and a prosperous economy -- may have difficulty accepting even the remote probability of human extinction. We must bring to the problem considerable analytical New Brain thinking, as we are exploring both the dangers and the opportunities of our future," (Zuckerman, 1996). Denial keeps the system of genocide going.

In conclusion, I feel that genocide is the result of both the potential of inherent violent tendencies that we all have in addition to the mismanagement and modeling that we encounter within the agents of our culture. It is impossible to pinpoint any specific one cause of this horrific human behavior, but this basic fact is quite evident: humans are naturally violent but whether we choose to express this violence is up to our individual consciences. Culture and collective will are powerful things to change but by being aware of our deadly potential there is hope of changing our present course of self-annihilation.

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