The psychology of evil: a contribution from psychoanalysis
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It has often been noted that evil – by which I mean evil in human motivation and action – is difficult to understand. We find it hard to make sense of what 'drives' a person to commit evil. This is not because we cannot recognise or identify with *some* aspect of the psychology of evil; we all experience feelings of envy, spite, cruelty, and hatred. But somehow this shared experience can seem insufficient, and we are left at a loss as to how such natural, universal human motivations could have resulted in *this*.

There are two fundamental reasons for this, relating to how we make sense of human motivation and action. First, as Aristotle observed, we standardly explain what someone does and why they do it in terms of the good they aim at, understood from their perspective. But is there always some (deviant conception of the) good at which the evil person aims? Or is evil better understood in terms of an attack on the good? Second, we often make sense of another's motivation and action by adopting their perspective, identifying with them 'off-line'. However, it is rare that a person understands their motives as evil. The apparent lack of an 'internal perspective' on evil casts our attempts at understanding adrift.

The aims of this paper are modest, to do no more than point in a particular direction our attempts to understand the psychology of evil. §2 is a synoptic overview of what I shall call the 'traditional' picture of the psychology of evil. In §3, I argue that this picture is explanatorily inadequate. §§4-6 develop the traditional picture by suggesting some resources drawn from psychoanalytic theory that can meet the explanatory challenge. My argument here is schematic, seeking only to motivate a research project. It would take a much longer exploration of these resources, providing far more psychological detail, to work out what can rightfully be called an *account* of the psychology of evil. §7 situates the psychology of evil in relation to 'normal' psychology by noting the positive functions of mental processes involved in the psychology of evil.

I shall not attempt to define what evil is, nor is the account intended to distinguish evil from the 'merely' bad. Given the connections we shall discover between 'normal' structures of motivation and evil ones, we may, in retrospect, even raise the question of whether the concept of 'evil' is well-defined. I assume the concept merely for the purposes of a rough-and-ready identification of a phenomenon we find both puzzling and challenging.

1. First, however, a word on approaching evil from the perspective of individual psychology. There is a debate in the social sciences over whether we can explain human motivation and action in terms of the individual, or whether such 'individualism' misrepresents the relation between individual and society. For example, some have argued that had Hitler not existed, some other person would have occupied a role in events similar to his. We cannot, therefore, understand the evils perpetrated by the Nazis without looking at their historical and social context. The approach of individual psychology, e.g. what went on in the minds of the Nazi leaders, is simply too narrow.

Bernard Williams (1995) helpfully distinguishes between 'formal' and 'substantial' individualism in the explanation of human motivation and action. Formal individualism makes the following two claims. First, there are deliberative or practical questions that are 'individually first-personal', i.e. an agent can only answer them by answering the question 'what shall *I* do (here and now)?'. They cannot, for instance, be answered in terms of what one or we should do. Second, what an individual does is often explained in terms of their deliberation, and insofar as their action is intentional, it can be explained in terms of a deliberation that they could have conducted. 'It follows from the two claims together that intentional action can always be explained by reference to a consciousness which the agent at least could have had and in many cases did have, and which refers to the agent.' (Williams, 1995, p. 125)

Formal individualism is necessary for the usual discriminations we want to make regarding whether an action is voluntary or otherwise, and in other ways fits well with our explanatory practices. But it importantly leaves open the question of the extent to which we must appeal to an individual's social environment and historical heritage to explain their deliberations, intentions, and consciousness. This question is taken up by substantial individualism, but it is a question we need not tackle. Formal individualism is enough to secure the relevance of an attempt to understand the structure of individual psychology, while allowing that this approach can be usefully complemented by social and historical analyses. It is not my purpose to provide an account of how and why an agent came to *acquire* an evil motivation, nor to address the question of responsibility and its location in individual or society. I aim only to outline what such a structure of motivation may look like.

2. There is a line of thought running through many accounts of the psychology of evil, whether theological or naturalistic, literary or historical, philosophical or psychological. We can find it, in various formulations, in Augustine, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Goethe's *Faust*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, in psychological and historical studies of the Nazis by Fromm (1973), Arendt (1963), Rosenbaum (1998), and Sereny (1995), and in book length treatments of the 'nature' of evil by Scott Peck (1983) and Midgley (1984). The line, which I call the 'traditional picture', is that the psychology of evil centrally involves pride, envy, and self-deception.

On this picture, there need be no single motive behind evil actions, between one agent and another or even between the various evil actions of a single agent. Evil is not the pursuit of a particular goal, nor is it necessarily an expression of fear or anger or desire. It may be, but it is not necessarily, motivated by a distinct desire or intention to do what is evil. Even when it is, we can helpfully understand this motivation, in part, in relation to the agent's pride and/or envy. Milton's Satan provides an initial example:

> To do aught good never will be our task;
> But ever to do ill our sole delight,
> As being contrary to his high will
> Whom we resist. (*Paradise Lost*, I.159-61)

> … Here at last
> We shall be free;…

Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven. (I.258-63)

Evil be thou my good; by thee at least
Divided empire with heaven's king I hold (IV.110-11)

For whatever reason (if there is a *further* reason in his case), Satan's pride will not accept submissiveness to God, and he adopts evil as a means of resistance. But this is not healthy defiance of an unjust dictator. While his actions protect his liberty, it is as important to him to rule over others. In this we see his envy of God (made explicit very early on in I.35). His pride connects not to a stable and realistic sense of self-worth, but to a hateful rejection of anything that has claim to be superior.

Milton brings out these connections further with Satan alone and tormented:

Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven.
O then at last relent! Is there no place
Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
None left but by submission; and that word
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame. (IV.73-82)

It would be a gross mistake to adopt this passage as a model for the psychology of evil, as though all evil people not only suffer terribly, but are fully aware of their suffering, their motives, their situation, and the connection between them. Milton's Satan is highly unusual in his self-awareness.

We can, however, tentatively generalize this complex of a) circumstance that threatens self-esteem, combined with b) an inability to tolerate such a threat or adjust one's self-image in consequence. We should add c) faults of character, first-personal knowledge of which we all struggle to gain and preserve. It is on this complex that pride and envy play: 'The trouble is not, of course, that vanity is the worst of the vices. It is just that it is the one which makes admitting all the others unbearable.' (Midgley, 1984, p. 122) The situation is all the more unbearable when complicated by envy, which imagines others, in their goodness and power, being free from such humiliating challenges to self-image.

It is not merely admitting one's faults that pride and envy make unbearable; realistically recognising one's situation and adjusting oneself to it can be equally so. In his discussion of evil, Adam Morton (2004, pp. 44-5) notes that empirical studies suggest that 'Violent individuals are more likely to have inflated than deflated beliefs about their own capacities and the attitudes of others to them… these beliefs are often wildly at variance with the facts… Their self-esteem is thus both inflated and vulnerable.' It is notable that, in various studies of Nazi leaders, the alternatives they faced prior to their rise within Nazism were, from their points of view, bleak and frustrated their enormous ambition. As is well-known, Hitler was a failed artist and virtually a tramp. Goebbels had a deformed leg, which excluded him from military

service, and was failing in a literary career. Eichmann was a travelling salesman with the Vacuum Oil Company, 'a failure in the eyes of his social class, of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well' (Arendt, 1963, p. 33). Himmler was constitutionally frail, and his family had suffered a loss of social prestige at the end of the Imperial system (Fromm, 1973, pp. 299ff.).

The damage to self-esteem threatened by a realistic recognition of oneself and one's situation invites d) self-deception. To suggest that an evil agent is self-deceived calls to mind the Socratic doctrine that 'no one does evil knowingly'. But the two are not equivalent, and the traditional picture need not suffer from the implausibility of Socrates' optimism. While it is rare that an agent admits that they intend to do evil, nevertheless, it is not impossible. Further, they may also know what they refuse to admit. What remains unknown to them, in a form that could impact on their deliberation and action, is their structure of motivation. (I shall clarify this claim in §4.) Self-deception, then, may or may not involve the agent's deceiving themselves about the morality of their actions. It more centrally involves the agent's deceiving themselves about the fundamental motivations at play in their deliberations. There is some aspect of the agent's psychology to which the adoption of an evil project is a psychological solution, and it is this that typically remains outside awareness. In this sense, Midgley's remark (1984, p. 59) that 'There does not seem to be an inside point of view on vice' is correct.

Self-deception, however, is a matter of degree, the truth more or less out of reach and cognizance. Different agents exhibit different degrees of it, leaving interpreters to wonder – 'Did he know what he was doing?'. Rosenbaum repeatedly remarks on the degree to which deceptions of one kind or another surrounded everything the Nazis did and said, so that it becomes very difficult to judge what e.g. Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels believed and what they did not. In her study of Eichmann, Arendt (1963, p. 51) notes that his self-deception was supported by just how widespread self-deception and mendacity had become in Germany at the time. Sereny's (1995) study of Speer reflecting in the 1960s on his involvement with Nazism, illustrates vividly the great difficulty he had in coming to accept the truth. But there is no reason to think that this struggle should mark every evil agent at the point of deliberation, to cause the kind of suffering Satan expounds. Self-deception can be far enough gone to leave behind only ripples. Furthermore, the degree to which an agent must invest in *self*-deception may diminish in proportion to the degree to which society carries the burden of deception.

Where self-deception has become a habit, protecting the agent's self-esteem against the intolerable threat it faces, it can grow to include an attack on thinking or thoughtfulness. Arendt's concludes (1963, p. 287) that 'Eichmann was not Iago… Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all… He *merely…never realized what he was doing*… [a] lack of imagination… It was sheer thoughtlessness.' Sheer thoughtlessness, however, is not a quality anyone is born with. So why or how had Eichmann come to be so very thoughtless? It is plausible to think of it as a trait cultivated in the service of self-deception. Self-deception and thoughtlessness connect in a refusal to explore the truth.

The contrast with Iago is telling, for, like Satan, Iago has a good degree of self-awareness, but he poses another puzzle. He has come to hate Othello, and seeks to

destroy him through arousing his jealousy, because there was a merest rumour that Othello had slept with his wife. The provocation is inadequate for the strength and depth of Iago's feeling. And, Midgley points out, we wonder what has happened to other motives that would normally balance feelings of revenge. In Iago's case, what has grown is not the degree of self-deception, but the feelings of jealousy and hate, fuelled by Iago's pride and envy (Othello has been promoted over him, as well). Iago refuses, at the end of the play, to explain himself: 'Demand me nothing; what you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak word.' Midgley interprets this as his recognition that 'To admit any of this [the extent of his jealousy and so on] would make himself not just odious, but contemptible and ridiculous… He would seem childish and foolish. But pride is the centre of his life. So he takes the only course which might preserve his dignity.' (Midgley, 1984, p. 148) If this is intended as a description of the content of Iago's deliberation, i.e. if Midgley is claiming that he recognises that he *is* contemptible and childish, but (merely) doesn't want others to reach that conclusion, then I think she attributes too much self-awareness to Iago. Because he is so proud, he would struggle to recognise these traits in himself. As plausible an interpretation is that he covers over his inability to say anything with the thought that he *will* not justify himself to others. This permits him not to think about how he would try to do so nor the traits that would be revealed if he were to undertake the attempt.

3. As helpful as the traditional picture is, it does not completely meet that sense of puzzlement remarked on at the outset. One can still be left with the sense of 'But how?'. For instance, how has self-deception worked to conceal reality, both the reality of the situation one is in and the reality of one's psychology, so extensively? How can pride or envy work to extinguish other motives, even to work against one's self-interest? How do pride, envy, and self-deception – from which we all suffer to some degree or other – develop to such an extent to produce evil?

It is possible to supplement this account of the psychology of evil, for instance, by appealing to genetic factors and socialization. Human beings are naturally prone to feelings of hatred, resentment, and feel threatened by challenges to self-esteem. These are the 'natural resources' on which pride, envy and self-deception can work. Or again, accounts of particular forms of socialization, e.g. repeated exposure to violence, may contribute to our understanding of why one individual rather than another develops the structure of motivation described. Broader social factors regarding what forms of thoughtlessness, deception, or violence are acceptable also play a part.

But such supplements, even if true and valuable, lack depth in terms of giving an account of the state of the agent's mind at the time of deliberation and action. We are still left with the question of how the structure of motivation *works*. If the question is not quite, 'what was he thinking?', then 'what was he *not* thinking, and how was he able not to think it?'. While we should not think that this focus on the individual's state of mind provides the whole story, it is an important part of the story, a part that it is worth getting clearer on.

If we try to understand the kind of self-deception involved within a framework of rational means-end reasoning, it becomes very difficulty to answer the explanatory challenge. The end: to protect one's self-image and self-esteem against threat; the

means: to deceive oneself (however this is to be understood, e.g. forming false beliefs, refusing to admit to consciousness certain evidence, etc.) regarding one's situation, desires and emotions and, furthermore, to act on this deception in such a way that the threat disappears. One trouble is that the means taken are commonly not rationalized by the end. For example, the end is part of one's self-interest; the consequences of low self-esteem can be appalling. Yet the path of action taken, apparently in the service of this end, does not always heed self-interest. Hitler's redeployment of troops from the Eastern Front to concentration camps at a time when Russia was gaining the upper hand has often been cited as an example. Self-interest itself is overridden by obsession; Satan and Iago provide further cases. We are therefore still left with the questions above – how could the agent's thought about reality have become so distorted?

4. In the rest of this paper, I shall restrict myself to discussing the psychology of those whom Midgley (1984, Ch. 7) calls 'instigators'. Many more people participate in evil practices, e.g. in the anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany, than originate such practices. For those who 'merely participate', those who are led rather than lead, much more needs to be said about group and social psychology. While there are still issues of self-deception, it is possible that quite a different account of the underlying structure of motivation that supports self-deception is necessary, e.g. to do with identification with the leader and the group.

It is easily and commonly recognised that the distortions in an agent's thoughts about their 'internal world' and the distortions in their thoughts about the 'external world' are closely related. For example, traits, feelings, and the internal origins of feelings that an agent cannot admit to are projected onto situations and into other people. (An angry person who projects their anger may mistakenly believe both that they are not angry and that some other person is.) The occurrence of projection has long been recognised, and some have recognised it as involved in the psychology of evil. But unless we make explicit reference to psychoanalytic theory, both our understanding of how projection is supposed to work, and the implications for our understanding of the mind, and so our understanding of the psychology of evil, tend to be undeveloped. Before undertaking – all to briefly – that task of development, a promissory note that projection introduces to our explanation of the psychology of evil.

Working with the 'commonsense' understanding of projection, we develop the traditional picture as follows. The evil agent is faced with feelings, whatever their source, that are intolerable. Typically, they experience the feelings as a threat to their self-image and self-esteem, an affront to their pride, and enviously imagine that others – not in their situation – are free of similar feelings. This is intended not as a description of their consciousness, but their structure of motivation. So, for example, an agent faced with intolerable feelings of impotence and envy will, under projection, come to think of others as weak, stupid, or even degenerate, and envious of the agent's power (or the power of the group with whom the agent identifies). These feelings and/or the traits or causes from which they arise are projected outside the mind of the agent, usually into others, some of whom become the victims of their actions.

In order to shore up the projection, to confirm its validity, e.g. in the face of contrary evidence, the agent may act in ways to bring reality into line with how it is imagined

to be. They seek to elicit feelings of impotence and envy in others, e.g. through humiliation, and to control and eliminate their own feelings of impotence and envy by controlling and eliminating those others into whom they have projected these feelings. In the extreme case, this means killing them. Or again, the 'belief' (perhaps more accurately described as a piece of imagination than a belief) that their victims are less than fully human is validated by treating them in dehumanizing ways. Projection does not *resolve* the initial feelings, although it may provide a psychological balm depending on how successful it is. Hence their self-esteem tends to be both inflated and vulnerable. The deliberations and actions of the agent are therefore motivated by an attempt to cope with, control, eliminate the feelings that are intolerable.

I said in §2 that there is an aspect of the agent's structure of motivation that remains unknown to them in a form that could impact on their deliberation and action. In saying this, I had in mind their ignorance of their projection, the complex of feelings to which it is a response, and the origin of their thinking and acting in projection. We have two ways of knowing about our own psychology, two perspectives on our mental states – very roughly, there is first-personal knowledge, by acquaintance, and third-personal knowledge, by description. For example, I may first come to the belief that I am jealous through accepting this account of my behaviour from a friend; and I can hold this belief without being aware of my jealousy 'from the inside', or directly and non-inferentially. This third-personal knowledge, however, would not normally count as 'self-awareness', and we are rightly doubtful of the integrity of anyone's deliberations that are based on such indirect beliefs.[1]

Usually, agents are simply ignorant of their projections. Unusually, an agent may form a belief about a projection of theirs, yet fail to have the 'inner' experiences that confirm the projection. It transpires that to fully recognise one's projection from the inside is not compatible with maintaining the projection. (An analogy may be drawn with Moore's paradox regarding belief: I cannot coherently maintain that I believe that p, but it is true that not-p. This can be no more than an analogy, as Moore's paradox rests on the place of rationality in belief formation, while rationality plays no such part in the formation of projections.) Therefore, at the time of deliberating or acting on the basis of projection, the agent must be unaware of the projection in a way that would suitably inform and modify that deliberation and action. If they were to become aware of the projection (not itself an easy matter), this would undermine the course deliberation takes. Gaining awareness of one's projections goes side by side with withdrawing them, at the very least, if one is to maintain any kind of coherence in thought.

We may worry: If the deliberation of an agent directed towards evil actions cannot take into consciousness the agent's projections, does this mean that evil actions are not intentional? And would it then follow that they were not responsible? Neither conclusion follows. First, we quite rightly hold people responsible not just for what they intended, but frequently for what they did not. For example, in a charge of culpable ignorance, we hold them responsible for acting in ignorance of the consequences of their action when they are responsible for gaining that knowledge. Second, all that follows from the account of projection is that, through their actions, the agent who does evil does not *intend* to control or eliminate the feelings they have projected. It does not follow that they do not intend to harm their victims or even 'to do evil'.

5. So much for the promissory note. What is lacking in the commonsense understanding of projection, which I believe psychoanalysis can uniquely supply, is an adequate theorization of the mental processes involved.

In psychoanalytic theory, projection takes several forms. What we have been discussing, the projection of traits or feelings of the subject into others, is the sub-species known as 'projective identification'. (The 'identification' relates to the psychological connection set up by the projection between the self and the other, such that the fate of (some part of) the self is connected to the fate of the other.) It is one of a number of mental operations which, when they occur in the service of defending the subject against mental pain, are sometimes called 'defence mechanisms'. As we shall see in §7, these mental operations are not always 'defensive' and detrimental to the agent's grasp of reality; and even when they are defensive, they can nevertheless be useful. Defence mechanisms operate on mental content that causes, or threatens to cause, mental pain, such as anxiety or guilt. Their purpose is to transform that content in such a way that pain or its threat is reduced or eliminated. Many prominent schools of psychoanalysis understand defence mechanisms to operate via unconscious phantasy, a concept first proposed by Freud (1911) but greatly developed by Melanie Klein and her colleagues.

Phantasy – the 'ph' spelling is used to indicate a distinction from conscious fantasy – is a form of imagination, but not one under the control of the agent's will. It is, in a number of important respects, like dreaming. At the time of dreaming, a dream is typically experienced as 'real', i.e. as an experience rather than a piece of imagination. Phantasy likewise has the power to produce a psychic sense of the reality of its product. For example, the phantasy that some intolerable part of oneself is not part of oneself, but part of some other, results in a state of mind that represents this to be the actual state of affairs. The agent comes to behave, feel, think, and in certain respects 'believe' that this is so.

In this way, the mental pain caused or threatened by the part of the self, now 'expelled' in phantasy, is diminished or even eliminated. For example, in the simplest examples of projective identification, a sense of worthlessness is replaced by a sense of the worthlessness of (particular) others; envy is replaced by a sense that (particular) others are envious. However, while pain may have diminished, the sense of threat typically remains. The agent is not free to simply ignore (these worthless or envious) others into whom parts have been projected. The parts, because they are projected parts of the self, continue to demand a response. There is a very unclear, but compelling, sense that one's identity is involved in responses to these others. Staying with our examples, 'worthless' others must be made aware of their worthlessness or treated as worthless; and it is by comparison with their worthlessness that one's own sense of worth (pride) is maintained. And so projective identification is typically supported by 'acting out'. The imaginative phantasy of projection in isolation alters the mind of the subject, but cannot alter the world outside their mind. Acting out does this, thus confirming and shoring up the imaginative project. The agent behaves in a way that seeks to make others feel worthless or envious. The feelings aroused in the others by the behaviour of the agent confirms the projection.

As already noted, projective identification is just one of a number of defence mechanisms. We were led to it by the discussion of the psychology of evil. But it is unlikely that it is the only defence mechanism employed in this psychology. This is one matter that a fuller account of the psychology of evil would need to investigate.

Defence mechanisms are not intentional, nor can they be accurately described within the standard structure of intentional explanation used for actions. A number of philosophers of psychoanalysis describe the mental operations as 'sub-intentional'.[2] The operations occur for a purpose, but they do not operate, for instance, via means-end reasoning. On the standard picture, beliefs and desires both motivate and rationalize the action. But while we might say that the end of reducing mental pain is desired, subjects do not pursue this end on the basis of beliefs such as 'if I project this part of myself, I shall reduce mental pain'. The end does not rationalize the mental operation, though the mental operation occurs precisely because it fulfils the end.

If, therefore, we attempt to understand evil actions in terms of *reasons* the agent may have for pursuing these actions, we will always come up short. As remarked at the end of §2, any reasons we find – such as the rumour that Othello had slept with Iago's wife – seem, in the normal course of things, inadequate to explain the action. It is this inadequacy that Midgley seeks to make good by appealing to projection. Psychoanalytic theory accounts for why appealing to reasons is inadequate. Projective identification does not operate rationally, nor does it provide the agent with a reason for their actions. In response to a sense of the intolerable, it distorts their sense of themselves and of others. In their ensuing deliberations, the agent is working with a representational and emotional distortion of which they remain unconscious (the origin, extent, and structure of the distortion cannot become fully conscious while the projective identification remains in play). A rational account, even one that appeals to self-deception, cannot describe the psychology of evil because that psychology rests fundamentally on non-rational factors. This is part of the explanation of our bewilderment by evil.

6. Analysing the psychology of evil in terms of defence mechanisms is a first step in employing the resources of psychoanalysis in application to this issue. I briefly indicate here two further steps that could be taken in using psychoanalytic theory to develop a fuller account of the psychology of evil. Again, I am discussing only the psychology of instigators, rather than those who participate through following.

It is worth noting that the account so far suggests that the distortion of the agent's relation to reality may be quite piecemeal, such that only that part of reality, those others, that serve as the recipients of projection is misrepresented. In developments after Freud, psychoanalysts increasingly came to appreciate that unconscious phantasies in the service of defence mechanisms related to a restructuring of the subject's whole relation to reality. Phantasies do not operate in isolation from each other. Rather, the way in which the subject understands and relates to reality, especially the realities of their own and others' psychology, forms a 'structured totality' (Lear, 2003, p. 199). The issue of worth, power, threat – whatever content the phantasy works with – is dominant in experience, not an isolated issue against a backdrop of well-adjusted emotional response and understanding. If we are able to, teasing out this structure, which will most likely be idiosyncratic, may help us further understand the psychology of individuals who do evil acts.

A second development relates to Melanie Klein's theory of two 'positions', originally put forward in relation to stages in child development, but which can be clinically identified independently of this.[3] Klein argued that mental functioning (in relation to desires and emotions, and so all thoughts informed by these) can take different forms. The 'paranoid-schizoid position' is marked by high levels of (paranoid) anxiety, a sense of intolerable threat, to which the subject responds with the defence mechanism of 'splitting' off those parts of the self that are involved in producing the anxiety. Klein's central example is of an infant, feeling furious with its mother, being terrified of both its own fury and its mother's imagined fury in response, and so splitting off its fury. It also splits its experience of its mother, relating to her as good (loving, providing) mother or bad (furious, depriving) mother. Splitting – the separating out of parts of the self – is a pre-requisite to projective identification, used as a form of defence.

The 'depressive position' is initially marked by depressive anxiety that is caused by the psychological unification of split parts or split experiences. In recognising that the loved mother is the same person as the one with whom it feels furious, the infant fears losing the loved mother and senses its dependence and lack of control. In an adult, withdrawing a projection and reclaiming a part of oneself that has been split off results in a similar experience. The part was projected because of the mental pain, perhaps the threat to one's self-image, that it caused. Reclaiming it results initially re-presents the threat to one's self-image, with the consequence sense of impotence and depressive anxiety.

However, this constellation of feeling is, to a certain extent, overcome by making (typically symbolic) reparation to that which one loves (including, in the adult case, oneself), and through the reduction of destructive impulses. This aspect of depressive position functioning leads towards emotional maturity (based, as it is, on reality) and creativity (as symbolic expressions of love and reparation). Depressive anxiety can, however, lead to a return to paranoid-schizoid functioning. That painful part of oneself, or the recognition of a painful aspect of reality, can provoke feelings of worthlessness, dependence, guilt, that prove too much, and result in a renewed bout of splitting and projection. Recent theorists have argued that we do not simply – at some point in development – achieve the latter stages of the depressive position and remain there. Instead, we all constantly move between the two forms of functioning, though one or the other may predominate.[4]

The psychology of evil, as we have described it, fits centrally within paranoid-schizoid functioning. A fuller account, therefore, can draw upon a more richly detailed theorization of the nature of this functioning and its effects.

7. The operations involved in defensive phantasy, and in paranoid-schizoid functioning, are universal, and not ones that we are able to do without. I finish with some remarks relating to the positive functions of those mental operations that also make possible the structure of motivation that leads to evil actions.

It is commonly recognised that defence at some level is generally protective of and necessary for mental functioning. Defence mechanisms first occur in early childhood because the feelings defended against are literally overwhelming. The child cannot

cope with them. George Eliot remarks in *Middlemarch* that 'If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence'. Arendt (2001, p. 266) concurs, noting that without 'standardized codes of expression and conduct [that] have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality… we would soon be exhausted'. We must, therefore, have or develop ways of failing to pay attention to or be moved by what we experience, which are forms of splitting off in relation to thought and emotion respectively. A specific example of the latter, in which the defence is intentionally developed by the agent, is the suppression, necessary in a good surgeon or pathologist, of disgust, horror, and other disturbing but immediate and natural reactions.

The type of phantasies involved in defensive functioning – positive or negative – also play roles in functioning that is not defensive. For example, splitting also occurs in idealization, as the latter involves the projection of good parts of the self. While idealization can be defensive, it is also necessary for the emotional development and strengthening of the self. It is through identifying with figures we have idealized that we gain a greater capacity for dealing with anxiety without using defence mechanisms. We come to develop and draw upon the strength, power, resilience that we imagine they have. This leads to less need for splitting and projection, yet the process begins with it.[5] Lear (2003, p. 201) notes that projection can lend 'a richness and texture to life'. Gifts I have received acquire a variety of sentimental values; places I have been are imbued with emotional resonances; and so on. Finally, projective identification is implicated in our empathic understanding of others.[6] The aim of the imaginative project of 'putting oneself in someone else's shoes' is not to rid oneself of some part, but to form an imaginative connection between oneself and another to affect one's understanding and feeling. There must, therefore, be the willingness, characteristic of the depressive position, to bear pain and to resist splitting one's understanding of the other into good v. bad. Nonetheless, the mental operations that enable empathy overlap significantly with those that enable projective identification in the service of defence.

If the psychoanalytically informed reading of the psychology of evil is correct, we can conclude that evil is inevitably a permanent possibility for human beings. Our psychological structure is such that we could not live or function, nor experience one of our most important sources of joy, our loving relationships with others, without mental operations that equally ground our capacity for evil.

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[1] I have defended this conclusion in Lacewing (2005).

[2] See Wollheim (1984: Ch. II), Gardner (1993: Ch. 6), Gardner (1991), Hopkins (1991). For critical discussions, see Pataki (2000) and Marshall (2000).

[3] See Klein (1952).

[4] See Britton (1998).

[5] See Segal (1973), Ch. 3.

[6] See Heimann (1950), Money-Kyrle (1956), Richmond (2004).