

Report - The May Dialogue

Origins of Conflict: Politics and the Shadow

20th May Colet House London

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This year's May Dialogue was held on Saturday 20th May at Colet House, West London. The theme for the day was the question as to whether civilisation was merely a thin veneer covering barbaric propensities within. Were there ways of coming to terms with the "shadow", the Jungian term for the dark side of our personality which is often projected onto others who become perceived as the enemy, that would address deeply the challenges posed by modern ideological, sectarian and ethnic conflicts. Another question was how do we account for moral "evil".

LORD DAVID OWEN, who had faced such challenges recently as a negotiator in the former Yugoslavia, had been due to chair the meeting but was unable to attend due to unforeseen commitments elsewhere. DAVID LORIMER chaired the event and gave us an introduction based on the fact that polarities or dualities actually exist within a greater non-duality or unity.

The first lecture entitled *The Shadow of Ourselves Written into Modern Politics* was by sociologist JEAN HARDY who teaches political philosophy and writes about psychosynthesis. She pointed out that any positive view produces a shadow, maybe more than just one shadow. She began with a discussion of the origins of political philosophy in modern Europe between the 16th and 19th centuries. Such philosophies were based on a conception of human nature purporting to account for the way humans behaved in a state of nature prior to civilisation. The views of the nature of humans put forward by the likes of Macchiavelli and Hobbes have become self-perpetuating myths remaining extremely influential in conservative and liberal thought. Furthermore, the likes of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke lived through times of enormous conflict with civil wars raging around them and thus their political thought was heavily informed by the need to control the internecine strife within societies which was perceived as the normal state of affairs.

Hardy holds that how we treat others depends on how we ourselves were treated as children and refers to the collective abuse of children by societal institutions. Prior to the 19th century there was little or no conception of childhood with young children perceived as miniature adults. As the concept of childhood developed it too was informed by the prevailing assumptions that human nature was essentially 'wicked', especially in Puritanical thought with notions of fallenness where humans were born 'sinners' needing to be controlled. Thus the political philosophy we have inherited was born of fear, distrust of others and a very negative conception of human nature.

With the rise of Capitalist society, the general view arose that the world exists to be conquered, the mentality of European Colonialism. Natives of other continents, animals and Nature were viewed as disposable commodities in the European lust for gold and power. Charles Darwin's view of Nature as red in tooth and claw was heavily influenced by such projections of capitalist society onto Nature. Hardy refers to the viewpoint of the Other in this dominant worldview, the Female, the poor, other races, Self-knowledge and reflection upon childhood experience as the Golden Shadow, the alternative views to the dominant

myths. Such voices had occasionally attained prominence in the writings of the likes of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Kropotkin and Gandhi. Science arose from the same socio-economic crucible as Western politics and economics and the time has come for a profound shift in the way we perceive the world in order to integrate the repressed Other, the feminine, introspective knowledge etc. into the dominant world view.

The second speaker was MICHAEL DANIELS, joint programme leader for the MSc in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University, and an expert on the Jungian concept of the shadow. His lecture was entitled *On the Psychology of Evil*. He noted at the start that the concept of 'evil' was unfashionable in intellectual circles having been hijacked by horror films, religious fanatics etc. Daniels finds the rejection of absolute conceptions of good and evil in postmodern thought to be mistaken and holds that there is a rational, scientific concept of evil. Evil is not a physical or a metaphysical substance; it is a descriptor implying the human capacity for moral judgement. As one questioner pointed out, such a view can only be a relativist position as Daniels' definition of 'universal goods' as being those upon which all rational people agree is idealistic.

Daniels developed a notion of deserved and undeserved harm with the former being the minimum harm that can prevent a greater undeserved harm. Acts which could never have moral justification such as rape, child abuse, infanticide, mutilation and torture were classed as absolute evil whereas certain types of theft and murder could be morally justified. Humans become capable of evil as soon as they are capable of inflicting undeserved harm; i.e. when the sense of self emerges with the ego consciousness and wilful action. Human nature and the unconscious are viewed as amoral as with the innate capacity for aggression that we share with animals. The unconscious is not intrinsically evil but components can become sources of evil. The personality defends itself against its own shadow qualities unacceptable to the ego by repression or projection. The latter is more dangerous as others become defined as enemies and harmful acts against them are interpreted by the ego as deserved. Moral evil results when others are treated as objects with no empathy shown towards them.

Daniels spoke of the role of enculturation in personality development and the need to replace the vicious cycle of childhood wounds to the Self-system being perpetuated on others in adulthood needing to be replaced with a virtuous circle inculcating the virtues of empathy and benevolence in children. Moral and religious systems are themselves amongst the greatest causes of evil in this respect. Daniels concluded stressing the central role of empathy and benevolence in moral relations with the need to develop (using Jungian terms) the archetypal centres of the realised Self, Buddha, Christ, Transcendent Witness etc. He noted that, from the transpersonal perspective, empathy might increase in span from one's family, clan tribe onwards and outwards to encompass the whole of Reality. He stressed the need for a truly transpersonal perspective with the whole person connected to the whole of Reality and the realization of Spirit.

The third lecture, *The Causes and Prevention of Ethnic Conflict*, was given by Paul Wilkinson, Professor of International Relations at St Andrews and an expert on political terrorism. He began with a survey of ethnic conflict in the world today noting the increase in low intensity intrastate conflicts in the post-Cold War period along with increasing refugee problems. Refugees can themselves create new ethnic tensions in host countries as with the Afghans in Pakistan. Of the conflicts ongoing between 1985 to 1994, 44% were ethno-nationalist and another 13% inter-ethnic or tribal conflicts. There has also been a rise of religious

fundamentalism and ethno-religious conflicts such as those in Sudan and Afghanistan are particularly intractable. Colonial diplomats had partitioned territories without paying heed to ethnic and linguistic divisions resulting in many of today's conflicts.

The causes of the recent upsurge in ethnic conflicts tended to be the resurfacing of historical hatreds going back many centuries, which had been suppressed by the Soviet Union. The dynamics of such conflicts were fuelled by memories of injustices, often myths. Wilkinson gave a case study on the rise of the KLA in Albania pointing out that there were numerous occasions prior to the outbreak of conflict when it could have been avoided. Diplomatic costs are miniscule compared to the cost of warfare. He stressed the need for long-term measures to prevent incitement to ethnic hatred especially the strengthening of democratisation.

The final lecture, entitled *Conspiracy Theory and the Politics of Paranoia*, was given by NICHOLAS GOODRICK-CLARKE who is an expert on the Western esoteric tradition and also on the occult roots of Nazism. He examined the dynamics of persecution, extermination and genocide by looking at the psychopathology of paranoia where delusions of persecution and grandiosity take over the mind.

Some people have a pervasive mistrust that leads to a malevolent character. The delusional system leads to everything making a negative sense to the paranoid mind such that everything is distorted into an element of a plot against oneself. Such persecutory and grandiose aspects lend themselves most readily to politics. Paranoids have enemies who have to be destroyed which can lead them to exterminatory behaviour. They are generally hostile towards the world, always prepared for an emergency that is defined as an assault on autonomy or free will (ego). The fundamental psychological process involved in paranoia is projection.

Goodrick-Clarke went on to examine how paranoia extended itself into the external dynamics of ethnic conflict, focusing on conspiracy theories. The conspiracy is an ideological narrative composed to describe why the enemy is dangerous to the group in question and its way of life. Paranoia leads to conspiracy being perceived as the main force in history with secretive cliques determining the course of historical events.

In order to seek remedies to such mind-sets we need to understand prominent, modern conspiracy theories that often arise when old orders feel threatened by rapid social change. Goodrick-Clarke discussed the myth of the Illuminati that linked the philosophers of the Enlightenment with Freemasonry and Jacobins etc. and the various forms of the Jewish conspiracy theory culminating with the Nazis. In the post-Cold war order old conspiracies are resurfacing in central Europe with anti-Semitism on the rise in Poland where there hardly any Jews remain. In the USA, with the "evil empire" gone, the federal government, CIA and the faceless bureaucracy have become targets of such theories with factors such as UFOs and AIDS thrown in for good measure.

The audience participated in some group discussions and questions to the speakers. I noted that Jean Hardy had stated that, unlike Europe, most societies don't have political theory. As in other areas, most Europeans are probably unaware of non-Western contributions. Indeed, as Chandragupta Maurya's famous minister Kautilya wrote his *Arthashastra* or Treatise on Statecraft nearly two thousand years before Machiavelli, the label 'Indian Machiavelli' is rather inappropriate! As Ronald Inden has noted in *Imagining India*, ancient

Indian statesmen were anti-utopian, recognising oscillation between periods of order and disorder as the natural way of things and that the dark side of human nature had to be domesticated and that this domestication had to be renewed after each period of social decay. A very long history of civilisation led to a more realistic view than the idealized states dreamt up by Western political philosophers.

Indeed, the Sanskrit word *Purusha* (Man) has roots meaning 'city/town dweller' indicating that the Indo-Aryans saw civilisation a distinction that separated certain societies from the realm of beasts. Humans are not born civilised, they have to be civilised by enculturation. Although an unfashionable idea nowadays, civilisation does involve the imposition of values and duties upon individuals repressing the manifestation of their base instincts. This is a point which is relevant to understanding conflict but also needs to be stressed in the context of post-modern cultural relativism where often it seems that 'anything goes'.

The lectures were generally well thought out and informative, showing how an understanding of psychology is essential to resolving pressing socio-political issues. I was pleased that Mike Daniels mentioned the transpersonal aspects of such issues. I had just been reading Trevor Ravenscroft's *The Spear of Destiny*, which gives valuable insights into the role of 'karmic' or collective memory processes into major historical processes like the rise of Nazism that are ignored by historians steeped in materialistic explanations. Modern Western ethics remains based on a pre-modern metaphysics of mind, body and spirit as it is impossible to base ethics on a picture of humans as mechanical abstractions with no free will. The notion of conscience in the New Testament is linked to notion of the Inner Voice and the (Divine) Light. This ties in with the classical Indian notion of the two selves symbolised by the two birds. The ego closes itself off from the world whereas it is our higher or deeper Self, the Atman, the Light or the Spirit within which connects us to the macrocosm through transcendental resonances underlying our empathy with other beings.

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Two tapes were made of the day's talks (morning and afternoon). Enquiries to Philip Royall, +44 (0)1453 766411 (Tel/fax)