

# The mortal storm: righteousness and compassion in moral conflict

CARL GOLDBERG

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**Abstract** *I am concerned here with those defects in moral development that inform our serious social problems. In recent times three widespread social outrages have severely shaken trust in the moral fiber of American society. Declaration by public officials together with citizen outcry suggest that the solution to these problems—and by implication, the reparation of American society's moral failings—is to strengthen the observational and punishing components of the superego of the American psyche. I strongly contend that strengthening the demands of the American superego will not accomplish the moral readdress of serious social problems. Clinical evidence is offered to argue that every society since the beginning of time—including prison populations—have a strong code of morality—emphasizing proper behavior. This morality has not prevented any society from cruelty by its members towards strangers and fellow citizens alike. By means of an assessment of the clinical data of interviews and psychological tests of Adolph Eichmann and other high Nazi officials tried at Nuremberg, it is shown that there are two very different codes of morality. One of these I term 'refluent' (superego) morality and the other 'reflective consciousness' (conscience) morality. Consequently, what differentiated the 'good' Nazi and the other destructive people was not a lack of refluent morality, but a deficiency of reflective consciousness. Empirical studies and literary sources are provided to indicate how conscience develops and the factors that impede this crucial moral sense.*

*(N)ature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses.*

Thomas Jefferson, in a June, 1814 letter to a friend.

I am concerned here with those defects in moral development that inform our serious social problems. I am writing in New York of the situation in America. Clearly, however, these issues are analogous to those found in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Three widespread social outrages during the past year have severely shaken our trust in the moral fiber of American society: Catholic priests abusing children, sexual predators abducting and murdering young girls, and officers of large corporations illegally manipulating their accounting practices in order to collect millions of dollars for themselves; while at the same time, depriving their rank-and-file employees of their pensions and life-savings.

Declarations by our public officials, together with citizen outcry, suggest that the solutions to these problems—and by implication, the reparation of our society's moral failings—require that these villains be severely punished by long-term imprisonment. Furthermore, as preventive strategies, those calling for reforms also demand the early detection of wrongful behavior by means of sophisticated psychological screening of candidates for the priesthood, better

police tracking of sexual deviants, and strict federal laws in regard to acceptable accounting practices by corporation officers.

A psychoanalytic purview of the reforms called for above suggests that we Americans, as a nation, believe that by strengthening the observational and punishing components of the superego of the American psyche we can successfully overthrow our moral failings. My clinical experience (Goldberg, 1997, 2000) strongly suggests that strengthening the demands of the superego of the American Psyche will not accomplish our aims. To illustrate my contention, I offer the following clinical occurrence: a not unusual event in prison is the brutal beating or even killing by other inmates (including those who have been diagnosed as psychopaths) of molesters and murderers of young children, the elderly, and the severely handicapped. How does one reasonably explain these reactions as self-interested behavior on the part of psychopath inmates. Indeed, this clinical example indicates that there exists even in prison populations a strong sense that certain social behaviors are unacceptable and deserve severe retribution for the offenders. In short, it would appear that a strong code of morality—emphasizing proper behavior—is alive and well even in prison. In this paper I define the obedience to the values and mores of one's society as *Righteous* behavior.

However, whereas righteous behavior has shaped every society since the beginning of the world, at the same time, few societies have been peaceful either in regard to their neighbors or within their own internal boundaries. Fear, hatred, and cruelty have pervaded the corridors of most societies. Not surprising, then, those psychopath inmates referred to above when freed from prison usually continue to victimize and hurt other people. Obviously, there is something crucial lacking in their moral development, but it is not—as I contend as my major thesis—a sense of righteous behavior.

I provide here a psychohistory perspective in order to investigate why people who have a sense of righteous behavior are, nevertheless, willing, and often quite eager, to victimize the weak, the vulnerable, and the unprotected. I confine my purview to Nazi Germany.

The sheer brutality and inhumanity of the Nazis' behavior toward those designated as outsiders during the Holocaust have been commonly described as the behavior of immoral, demented brutes. I seek to show here that such a facile depiction of the Nazis does not hold up to psychological scrutiny. However, by examining a spurious notion in our understanding of moral behavior, I suggest here a new direction for understanding virulent hatred and brutality.

### **The mental status of the Nazis**

Adolph Eichmann ranks near the top of the list of the most destructive people who has ever lived. Half a dozen Israeli psychiatrists examined Eichmann before his trial in Jerusalem, but not one was able to discern any serious abnormality in his intellectual functioning or any other indications of a mental illness. Indeed, one of the psychiatrists, emotionally agitated from having to be in close quarters with this architect of genocide for several hours, commented that Eichmann is normal, '(m)ore normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him' (Arendt, 1963, p. 25). Another psychiatrist indicated that 'his whole psychological outlook, his attitude toward his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters and friends, was not only normal but most desirable' (Arendt, 1963, p. 26).

British political scientist B. Clarke (1980) wrote that which concerned him most about Eichmann was not his madness but his sanity. Eichmann's tragedy, Clarke claims, was 'that he did not inherently lack the faculties of understanding, reason and will but merely gave up the active and personal use of these faculties—that he deferred in all important aspects to the faculties of others [e.g., Hitler and Himmler].'

Sixteen other leading Nazi officials, as war criminals, were examined by two American

Army officers, psychiatrist Douglas Kelley and fluent German-speaking clinical psychologist Gustave Gilbert, soon after the Second World War—as part of the preparation for the Nuremberg trials. In order to determine whether the personality organization and psychological functioning of these men had incurred some form of psychopathology that could explain their behavior, they were administered The Wechsler-Bellevue Adult Intelligence Test, The Rorschach, The Thematic Apperception Personality Test and were interviewed on numerous occasions by Kelley and Gilbert.

The Nazi war criminals evaluated were:

1. Hans Frank: Minister of Justice and the German commander who had put down the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
2. Hans Fritzsche: Chief deputy to Joseph Goebbles
3. Walter Frunk: Minister of Economics
4. Herman Goerring: Second in command to Adolph Hitler and Luftwaffe Chief
5. Rudolf Hess: Hitler's secretary
6. Ernest Kaltenbrunner: Chief of the concentration camps
7. Wilhelm Keitel: Chief of Staff for the Armed Forces
8. Constantin von Neurath: Protector of Bohemia and Moravia
9. Franz von Papen: Vice Chancellor under Hitler
10. Joachim von Ribbentrop: Foreign Minister of State
11. Alfred Rosenberg: Editor of the major Nazi newspaper and the leading anti-propagandist in Germany
12. Fritz Sauckel: Plenipotentiary General of the Utilization of Labor ('slave labor')
13. Hjalmar Schacht: Minister of Economics of the State
14. Baldur von Schirach: Youth Leader for the Third Reich
15. Artur Seyss-Inquart: Governor to occupied Poland, Austria, and The Netherlands
16. Albert Speers: Hitler's chief architect

Ten leading projective test experts were asked to evaluate blind the Nuremberg Prisoners' protocols—that is to say, they were given the responses to the Rorschach of the prisoners without prior knowledge of whose clinical data they were examining. The results were surprising. The Rorschach protocols were interpreted as indicating that whereas the Nuremberg Prisoners had a wide range of differences in their personality adjustment—from the exceptionally well-integrated personalities of Schacht and von Schirach to the severely disturbed Hess and Von Ribbentrop—nevertheless, none showed any marked superego impairment. Certainly, none was shown to be a hostile, impulse-driven sadist.

On the basis of these findings, the Rorschach interpreters reported: 'we must conclude not only that such personalities are not unique or insane, but that they could be duplicated in any country of the world today' (Harrower, 1976). In keeping with this interpretation of the clinical data, '(t)he Nazi themselves, almost to a man, clung to the defense that they simply were normal victims of circumstances—loyal, well-intentioned and obedient to the perverted wills of their superiors (whoever that conveniently happened to be)' (Ritzler, 1978).

In a summary chapter evaluating the multitude of clinical papers and books written about the psychological assessment of the Nuremberg prisoners, Brofsky & Brand (1980) add to Harrower's findings, '[a]t the present time we as psychologists have been unable to satisfactorily "explain" the motivations and personality organization that prompted the NCWS [the Nazi war criminals] to such grotesque and inhuman acts.'

Common sense surely finds a remarkable discrepancy between the psychologists' interpretation of the clinical data and the barbarism of the acts instigated or condoned by the Nazi leaders. Only two explanations seem possible. We can choose to believe, as many apparently still do, that the reports of the kinds and the numbers of atrocities during the Holocaust were

greatly exaggerated—that is, the defendants at Nuremberg were not guilty of the sheer magnitude of heinous crimes attributed to them. Or we can doubt the adequacy of the interpretations of the psychological findings of these malevolent criminals.

Since the reality of the Holocaust cannot be denied by rational beings, we are left with the second conclusion: the tests and interviews failed to detect psychopathology because the theoretical assumptions upon which the psychologists interpreted the test data was unable to recognize crucial signs of moral defect in the responses of the Nuremberg Prisoners.

### **The psychoanalytic notion of moral deficit**

At the time that the Nuremberg Prisoners' clinical data were interpreted, Freudian psychoanalytic theory guided almost all in-depth psychodynamic assessment of personality. There simply were no other substantial theoretical competitors.

Psychoanalytic theory regards the prohibitions and commands of the superego as the primary basis of an individual's personal morality. In other words, the superego is formed from a person's identification with societal values through the incorporation of that person's parental moral authority. Consequently, immoral behavior is regarded in psychoanalytic theory as due to a limited or poorly functioning superego.

### **Freud's confusion of superego and conscience**

Viewing moral conduct as an autonomous act of healthy striving comes from the belief that its expression is a manifestation of affection for others rather than compelled from the fear of punishment for wrongful behavior.

Freud (1905), however, mistrusting love as a binding force in mature relationships, rejected affection as a healthy mainspring of human behavior. Instead, he viewed it as a seductive, repetitive magical wish inflicting everyone. In short, he believed that intimate attachments were the rediscovery of the lost object—in which the experiences of affection and love repeat infantile patterns. Predicated upon the mother–child bonding, disappointments in adult attempts at intimacy result in inevitable narcissistic hurt and depression. As such, love sentiments were for Freud an unreliable guide for moral conduct.

Freud also did not trust altruistic behavior. In his writings (Freud, 1930, and his letters to Albert Einstein) he reduced all human strivings to conflictual drives; and by so doing, he eschewed altruism and other virtuous behavior as fundamental human attributes. He claimed, instead, that these apparent virtues are actually psychological defenses compelled by feelings of guilt, and/or grandiose fantasies to mask impotence feelings.

Someone who believes that neither affection nor altruism is genuine, is left with only fear and the threat of punishment as moral guardians. Freud (1923), therefore, held that the superego—predicated on fear and threat—is the agent of morality. However, as Coles (1981) indicates,

the moral texture of a life is, one suspects, not going to be fully explained by an analysis of how the ego negotiates with the id and the superego. Nor is the ego or the superego, important as they be to an understanding of moral development, quite all we need to know in the face of certain dilemmas. [As] Erik H. Erikson has shown us in his studies of Luther and Gandhi, and as any number of clinicians come to realize in the course of their everyday professional lives, neither among the great nor among ordinary people do defense mechanisms quite account for the entirety of psychological life.

A balanced purview of psychoanalytic writing on moral development should indicate, in

agreement with Coles, that some psychoanalytic writers have suggested that the moral development of the child cannot properly be reduced to the inculcation of parental values from the threat and fear of punishment. These theorists (Brunswik, 1940; Macalpine, 1950; Greenacre, 1954; Grinker, 1957; Spitz, 1958; Schaffer, 1960; McDevitt, 1979) have discussed the affectionate qualities of the mother-child bonding and have suggested that through a loving identification with the mother the child acquires a potential for generosity and concern for others. The import of this insight, however, is unsystematically scattered through the psychoanalytic literature. I contend, therefore, that throughout its history and until this day, psychoanalytic theory in general has regarded virtuous behavior as a defensive strategy to avert the threat of introjected parental punishment. Nevertheless, whether or not one agrees with my overall assessment, it is clear that the view I have presented of psychoanalytic notions about moral development prevailed at the time when the Nuremberg prisoners' clinical data was interpreted.

### **Differentiating conscience from superego**

An important lead in understanding why righteous people are willing to treat others without regard to their humanity comes from the work of Eli Sagan—who persuasively argues that for the superego to be moral it needs the services of the *conscience*. He (Sagan, 1988) points out that '(t)he relative health or pathology of the superego is [actually] dependent on how much or how little of conscience is operative in its functioning' (p. 14) because the *superego always collaborates with its own corruption*. In contrast to superego, the conscience is fostered in love, derived from the child's strong early bonds with loving caretakers.

It should not surprise us, then, that Freud's misconception of superego and conscience makes it rather difficult to make any psychological sense of heinous acts by individuals with strong superegos. As Sagan (1988) indicates, 'the mechanisms of the superego makes it possible to use almost any virtue in the most horrible of human projects ... the Nazis used all the trappings of the superego to promote genocide' (p. 13). In other words, the 'good' Nazi was loyal, obedient, even willing to sacrifice his life to carry out the prescriptive norms of his society. Because his superego was not deficient, but actually too severe and punitive, he perceived of life only in bold black or white dimensions.

Nevertheless, in the reality of adhering to any moral code, there arises uncertainty as whether to be more righteous or more compassionate in a particular situation. We can detect this dilemma in a speech given by Heinrich Himmler, the odious overseer of the German concentration camps to his SS officers:

I want to talk to you quite frankly on a very grave matter ... I mean ... the extermination of the Jewish race ... most of you must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500, or 1,000. To have stuck it out and at the same time—apart from exceptions caused by human weakness—to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written' (Manwell & Fraenkel, 1965, p. 132).

What the 'good' Nazi lacked, then, was not lack of recognition of moral options, but rather a dearth of empathy, compassion, and concern for people who were not like him (in whatever ways his limited insight about the humanity of other people impressed upon him).

Is there any evidence that verifies my notions about the differentiation of superego and conscience in the clinical data of the Nuremberg Prisoners? Apparently, there is. Barry Ritzler (1978) reports that the Nuremberg Prisoners, based on the Beck (Beck *et al.*, 1961) system of analyzing the content of Rorschach responses:

were distinguished [from the other populations of whose Rorschach responses they were compared: schizophrenics, depressed patients, and state troopers] only by a significantly low percentage of human responses. In the absence of any other indication of severe psychopathology, the low human percent stands out as a suggestion of an inability to empathize with other human beings. It also suggests the Nazis may have had an incomplete sense of their own identities as human beings.

### Literary accounts of conscience

In the real world, the usual moral struggle is not choosing between purely good and purely evil options—it involves *competing* and *conflicting* moralities. Indeed, in extreme situations acting in a courageous and compassionate way, may and often does, involve violating duty to family, and the ostensible values of one's society.

Consider the situation of the rescuers of the Jews and other persecuted people trying to flee the Nazis. To those they saved, they were expressing the highest moral virtues. But, stop and consider what the families and neighbors of these courageous people might have felt. Some may have approved, and indeed, a number of entire families were involved in aiding the oppressed. But still more families and their neighbors—especially those whose lives were threatened, if not forfeited, by the rescuer's actions—undoubtedly, believed that the rescuer was violating his or her duty to protect them from harm for the sake of the welfare (in most cases) of strangers.

As is so often the case, it is the literary master psychologists, rather than professional psychologists who have provided the most brilliant insights into our moral dilemmas.

In several passages of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck struggles with a dilemma as to whether he should turn in the runaway slave Jim—with whom he has formed a strong affectionate bond—to the authorities. Not to do so would violate the moral lessons his PreCivil War Southern society had taught him about proper and responsible behavior. But Huck doesn't want to return his friend, who escaped to rescue his children. He feels guilty and fears punishment—the consequences of violating the demands of his sense of righteousness for considering a course of action that neglects his societal duty—especially since Jim has talked about murdering the white people who have taken away his children.

Yet, Huck realizes that if he turned in Jim, he would feel worse than if he did what he intuitively senses as proper—helping Jim to escape. Huck is uncertain about the basis of his feelings, since they seem unrelated to anything he has ever been explicitly taught. As Helen Lynd (1958) points out, 'Huckleberry Finn had no doubt that he was doing wrong, but, because of some wider feeling of human decency that he could not name, he could not bring himself to do what his society called right' (p. 36).

In the end, Huck follows his intuition about the right thing to do. His conscience—based on his love for Jim—enables him to regard Jim as a struggling fellow human like himself, rather than a piece of property to be returned to his owner (as his sense of duty demands), overriding his fear of punishment.

Mark Twain's insight about altruistic behavior is in firm accord with studies of actual courageous altruists, such as those who rescued the Jews during the Holocaust. These people commonly perceived themselves as strongly linked to others through a shared humanity (Tec, 1986; Monroe *et al.*, 1990; Fogelman, 1994).

J.-J. Rousseau's *Emile* is the second superb classic work of literature that can help us understand the development of human conscience. Rousseau's treatise on moral philosophy is predicated on the recognition that the human infant is born naturally good. Error and vice, he claims, imposed from the outside from the demands for private property and material wealth, subtly subvert our inherent goodness (Jimack, 2000).

The novel *Emile* consists of Rousseau's philosophy of how a tutor can successfully inspire from infancy—by didactic and dramatic lessons in living—a virtuous adult. Below I have abstracted several of the most important of Rousseau's principles in the moral education of his pupil Emile:

Remember you must be a man yourself before you try to train a man; you yourself must set the pattern he shall copy. [Your] authority will never suffice unless it rests upon respect for your goodness (p. 69).

Rather than hasten to demand deeds of charity from my pupil I prefer to perform such deeds in his presence (p. 80).

The only moral lesson which is suited for a child—the most important lesson for every time of life—is this: 'never hurt anybody' (p. 81).

Men are taught by fables; children require naked truth (p. 91).

The degrees of conscience are not judgments but feelings. Although all of our ideas come from without, the feelings by which they are weighed are within us, and it is by these feelings alone that we perceive fitness or unfitness of things in relation to ourselves, which leads us to seek or shun these things (p. 303).

The child's first sentiment is self-love, his second, which is derived from it, is love of those around him; for in his present state of weakness he is only aware of people through the help and attention received from them. So a child is naturally disposed to kindly feelings because he sees that everyone about him is inclined to help him and from this experience he gets the habit of kindly feelings toward his species; but with the expansion of his relations, his needs, his dependence, active or passive, the consciousness of his relations to others is awakened, and leads to the sense of duties and preferences (p. 209).

So pity is born, the first relative sentiment which touches the human heart according to the order of nature. To become sensitive and pitiful the child must know that he has fellow-creatures who suffer as he suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and others which he can form some idea of, being capable of feeling them himself (p. 220).

First Maxim—It is not in human nature to put ourselves in the place of those who are happier than ourselves, but only in the place of those who can claim our pity (p. 221).

Second Maxim—We never pity another's woes unless we know that we may suffer in a like manner ourselves (p. 222).

Third Maxim—The pity we feel for others is proportionate, not to the amount of the evil, but to the feelings we attribute to the sufferer (p. 223).

Empirical studies of how altruism develops in the young child, as I show below, tend to confirm Rousseau's program for the development of moral behavior. Of course, critics of Rousseau's notions of moral development contend that Rousseau sidestepped the Socrates–Freud question of moral choice: whether the person who has insight into the good can still choose evil. As I have already shown, this issue rarely is encountered in the real world as a struggle between purely good and evil choices.

### **An overview of altruism as a developmental process**

We know that humans intuitively feel a natural sympathy toward others. Evidence of sympathetic responsiveness has been repeatedly shown in empirical research. For example, newborn infants cry more when other infants in the same room cry than when they hear the noise of a similar volume or from computer-simulated cries (Simner, 1971; Sagi & Hoffman, 1976).

Apparently, however, a genetically determined proclivity for a concern for others is insufficient alone for the development of altruism. In other words, if sympathetic responsiveness is an innate human proclivity, but if by adulthood some people demonstrate a significantly greater capacity than do others for altruistic behavior, we may reasonably conclude that nurturing and learning experiences during childhood have a crucial influence on the expression of sympathetic responsiveness toward others. In short, while we don't yet know the magnitude of importance of each of the moral lessons of childhood, it is necessary to recognize the factors required so that the child develops his or her capacity for helping behavior, as opposed to more egoistic tendencies.

In their review of the literature on the child's concern for others, Yarrow *et al.* (1973) conclude:

(I)t appears that nurturance is more likely to have positive influence on learning when (a) it is a meaningful, warm relationship that has built up over time, (b) when it has included some withholding of nurturance, (c) when it not only precedes the adult's modeling but is continuous throughout the entire modeling sequence, and (d) when children have responded to real victims.

To elaborate on these findings: a plethora of studies have indicated that the observation of others who behave in a helpful manner elicits helpful responses from a child.

1. However, for helpful behavior to become a regular part of the child's repertoire the socializing agent must do more than espouse altruistic values; he must act in accordance with these values (Bryan, 1972).
2. Warm affection of the child by an adult—by intensifying the child's desire for approval—becomes a dependable basis for impulse control and 'other-oriented discipline by inducing positive internal forces, possibly capitalizing on the child's capacity for empathy and thus leading to a more active consideration for others' (Hoffman, 1963).
3. The relationship between the mother's empathic care-giving behavior and the child's emotional responsiveness in altruistic acts reflects the emergent development of the child's empathic sensitivity (Zahn-Waxler *et al.*, 1979).
4. An assignment of responsibility that he be helpful to others enhances a child's overall concern for others, particularly if it occurs in the child's first grade experience (Staub, 1970).
5. The most important socializing technique in acquiring concern for others is either that of role playing, or the provision of cognitive perspectives separate and different from the child's previous worldview. Such diverse perspectives lead to a decreasing amount of egocentricity and an increasing wider and more integrated understanding of other peoples' needs (Rushton, 1976).
6. Expressions of generosity in the child generally increase with age. Moreover, those children within an age group who have the highest levels of moral judgment ability and role-taking capacity, tend to be more generous than those children who have lower levels of moral judgment and role-taking ability (Rushton, 1976).
7. Children are capable of learning norms that dictate their assistance to others in distress (Bryan & Walbek, 1970).

8. Allegiance to a norm of helping others increases with age, at least until 9 or 10 years (Midlarsky & Bryan, 1967).
9. Altruism doesn't necessitate self-abnegation. When the child is feeling positive toward himself, self-gratification and altruism co-exist. Consequently, the greater the proclivity of a child to be generous to himself, the greater is his tendency to provide for others (Rosenhan *et al.*, 1974).
10. The rendering of one good deed increases the likelihood that a person will do another (Harris, 1972).
11. In being confronted with a decision to help, a person who has been attentive to the plight of another may, quite literally, think first about the needs and concerns of others. In contrast, those who focus primarily on their selves think first of their own concerns (Thompson *et al.*, 1980).
12. 'After joy or sadness (and quite possibly other affects) are experienced, and one is presented with an opportunity to help, tacit social comparison processes are triggered in which a person quickly examines whether his or her emotion is relatively greater or less than that of the needful other. The outcome of that examination determines the subsequent cognitions that arise. If one perceives that another's sadness is much greater than one's own, one's subsequent thoughts are more likely to be directed to the plight of the other and to the fact that the other requires help. If, however, one perceives that one's own sadness outweighs another's, then cognition that is likely to arise is "I need comfort and help." Under such circumstances, altruism declines' (Rosenhan *et al.*, 1981).

Other psychological studies (Wright, 1942; Grinder, 1964; Hoffman, 1975; Zahn-Wexler *et al.*, 1979; Clary & Miller, 1986) indicate that for helping behavior to become integral to the child's character at least one of the child's parents (or some other highly significant caretaker) must during the child's socialization represent three attributes: a model of altruistic values; a consistent and fair agent of discipline; and a person who conveys warm affection. These findings, consistent with Rousseau's notions as to the requirements of moral training in the development of conscience in the child, also, closely correspond to the childhood factors in the lives of German Anti-Nazis.

### German anti-Nazis

David M. Levy (1946, 1948), a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, in his capacity as a American military medical officer at the end of The Second World War, carried out an extensive investigation of Nazis and anti-Nazis for the purpose of determining those life history and personality factors that decisively differentiated these two types of Germans. He limited his study to males who had a choice in whether or not to affiliate with the Nazis. He included in his study both those he categorized as 'passive' anti-Nazis and those who were "active" anti-Nazis. Levy defined passive anti-Nazis as "those who opposed the regime by resistance in the form of refusal to join the Nazi party and general noncompliant behavior" and active anti-Nazis as 'those who opposed by organized or individual aggressive acts, ranging from public utterances and the spreading of leaflets to sabotage' (Levy, 1948). His rationale for the inclusion of both is based on his contention that the 'so-called passive anti-Nazis in their noncompliance may, in special instances, show more courage and suffer severer penalties than those active anti-Nazis, whose activities were limited to sporadic outbursts of criticism in public places' (Levy, 1948).

Levy's differentiation of German Nazis and German anti-Nazis consisted of six factors. They are: paternal, maternal, position in the family, religious crossover, political or religious anti-Nazis influences, and the influence of reading and foreign travel. His investigative

hypothesis is that German anti-Nazis significantly differed from German Nazis in a predominance of these background factors. In brief, his generalization about the typical German family during the developmental years of his subjects' lives is as follows:

The typical German father is dominant in the family and uses corporal punishment in the discipline of his children. The child in awe of the father, does not talk freely with him. The German mother typically is undemonstrative in her caring for her child after his preoedipal years. She devotes her affection to her youngest child. On the other hand, a favorite or an only child has a special position in the family. Not only is he given more attention from the mother than are children in larger families, he also is more likely to be protected by her from the father's corporal punishment. The usual German is either a member of the Evangelic or Roman Catholic churches. He marries a woman of his own nationality and religious faith. In the typical family anti-Nazi sentiments were openly expressed. However, the number of families in which active opposition to the Nazi was fostered was small. Except for vacations, travel is typically confined to the homeland. Few foreign or radical books and publications are read. (Levy, 1948).

Levy's 21 case studies confirm that the life histories and personalities of his German anti-Nazi subjects significantly differed from that of the typical German:

(A)s a group the anti-Nazi German, in comparison with typical Germans, have escaped the conventional and rigid family structure. They have been brought up with more affection and less constraint. Their world is a broader one, less limited in terms of religion, social, and intellectual boundaries. They have a more critical attitude. They are freer from conventional thinking. [B]ecause of the absence of a disciplinary father maternal affection was more freely manifested; hence the corresponding results of more warmth and kindness. A more expansive growth occurred (Levy, 1948).<sup>1</sup>

What is the *more expansive growth* to which Levy alludes? I believe that it is the key to an understanding of the development of conscience. I examine this issue here from the perspective of the crucial importance of the development of a reflective capacity in moral judgment.

### **Righteousness as a reflux morality**

We are captive of the verbal concepts our language provides us to shape the parameters in which we define and come to know our selves and others. It is articulate language, after all, that enables us to be *sentient*; that is to say, capable of understanding ourselves and others, and creating a caring relationship with them. In contrast, lacking the words and linguistic concepts to articulately address their sense of injustice, authoritarian-oriented individuals from childhood on feel incompetent and self-contemptuous. Unable to competently articulate their hurt feelings, they express secondary rage. As a consequence, their language is usually heavily infused with aggressive, need-oriented words and concepts. Whenever they try to express tender or caring feelings, they generally find at their disposal only crude and shallow linguistic concepts. In other words, those who are raised in a language in which power relations and aggressive expression is the pathway to others, come to know themselves as bearers of aggression, which is expressed as the only comfortable way to deal with other people. They attempt to rid themselves of their self-hatred by displacing their sense of badness on to specific vulnerable people or groups of people with social, religious, and political values different than their own.

In studying the lives of German Nazis (Goldberg, 1997), it appears that as children, they

were made to feel ashamed by authoritarian parents of their 'unacceptable' feeling—such as disagreement and anger at parents and other authority figures. Because they were discouraged from these and, indeed, any deeply felt emotions, they had difficulty empathizing with the pain and suffering of others. Unable to express a caring identification with others, in situations in which they subliminally sensed a similar painful vulnerability with another, they stuck out viciously to silence their resurrected hurt. In other words, they tried to eliminate their unwitting mistrust of their own inner resources by adherence to a rigid obedience to the undigested (introjected) enactment of the values and mores that authoritarian figures impressed upon them since childhood.

Their code of morality required minimal reflective deliberation in its application.

It is only a morality of conscience that requires reflection and a willingness to struggle with societal-imbued values.

### **Conscience as a reflective consciousness**

Crucial to the development of conscience, Rousseau seems to suggest, is the agent's self-reflectivity in regard to the interiority of the other; enabling the agent to respond to the other as oneself. In this regard, the word conscience is closely linked in many languages with the concept of consciousness—both imply the capacity to *know with*. Accordingly, the social philosopher Erwin Straus describes man as 'the questioning being'; he, who at the same moment that he exists, can question himself and the way he lives his own existence (May *et al.*, 1958). Indeed, the essence of conscience is the capacity to look beyond the limitations of the moral values one has introjected and to envision a more compassionate and noble way of being with other people.

In other words, a person's overriding need in the development of a constructive moral perspective is to find within himself positive qualities about himself and his life and to use this recognition to establish his own identity in a self-enhanced way. One cannot authentically love another without genuinely caring for oneself. Thus, the most difficult task, indeed, the turning point in the establishment of a morality of conscience, is to gain a trust in one's own goodness and to use this sense to find the good in the interiority of the other.

Conscience, as such, involves a courageous reflection about oneself and others. It requires us to know our limitations, to accept ourselves as less than perfect, to live to the best of our abilities, and to come caringly together with others to heal the wounds of loneliness, shame, and self-hatred. This is the stuff that love, compassion, and virtue are made. And this is the stuff from which we must build a more caring and just world.

### **Conclusion**

If we are to ably address the moral defects of American society, we must, of course, understand moral development. A system of morality is a statement of how a person ought to behave. As such, morality is derived from a conception of the necessary responsibilities members of an ideal society must establish and maintain in concert with others.

Encouraging moral responsibility rests upon the knowledge of virtue. Consequently, to perform a constructive role for the society it serves, a theory of morality needs to competently explain how virtuous behavior develops. Unfortunately, '(t)here has rarely been an active, systematic search for goodness' (Schulweis, 1990). Nevertheless, as psychotherapists we need to devote a considerable portion of our work to helping our clients gain access to their personal goodness—by enabling them to recognize and then overthrow the fears, anxieties, and shames that have impeded the realization of their goodness. In short, as psychotherapists we need to devote far more attention to admirable and constructive mainstreams of human

development, such as conscience as an empathic and compassionate guide to moral issues. As Peter Marin (1981) points out, 'the future task of therapy becomes clear: to see life once again in a context that includes the reality of a moral experience and assigns a moral significance to human action.'

## Note

1. Consistent with the findings of German anti-Nazis' life histories and personalities were those French Catholics who saved Jews during the Nazi occupation, even though a number of these rescuers were in fact members of pro-fascist, anti-Semitic organizations. Interviewers found that these rescuers came from family background of openness, compassion, and empathy (Schulweis, 1990). These virtuous people commonly perceived themselves as strongly linked to others through a shared humanity. Although they were keenly aware of the perils to themselves and their families, their first consideration seemed to be the needs of others in danger. Said one such rescuer, 'You wanted to be able to look yourself in the eye the following morning' (Schneider, 2000).

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**Résumé** Dans cet article je me penche sur les imperfections du développement moral qui sous-tendent nos sérieux problèmes sociaux. La confiance dans la fibre morale de la société américaine a été sévèrement secouée récemment par trois outrages sociaux de grande envergure. Les déclarations faites par des figures publiques ainsi que l'indignation des citoyens suggèrent que la solution à ces problèmes—et par implication, la réparation de la faillite de la moralité de la société américaine—est de renforcer les composantes observationnelles et punitives du super ego de la psyché américaine. Je conteste très fortement que le renforcement des demandes du super ego américain puisse produire un redressement moral des problèmes sociaux sérieux. J'offre une évidence clinique pour démontrer que chaque société depuis le début des temps- y compris les populations des prisons— a un code de moralité très fort- qui met en valeur le comportement acceptable. Cette moralité n'a pas empêché les membres de quelque société que ce soit de cruauté vis à vis d'étrangers ou de membres de cette même communauté. L'étude et l'évaluation des interviews et des tests psychologiques d'Adolph Eichmann

*et d'autres Nazi officiels de haut rang durant le procès de Nuremberg, démontre la présence de deux codes de moralité très différents. L'un d'eux j'appelle «refluent» (super ego) et l'autre moralité à «conscience réfléchissante». Il semble que ce qui divisait les «bon» nazis des personnes destructives n'était pas un manque de moralité «refluent», mais un déficit de conscience réfléchissante. Des études empiriques et des sources littéraires sont fournies pour souligner comment la conscience se développe et les facteurs qui entrave ce sens moral crucial.*

**Zusammenfassung** Der Autor zeigt sich besorgt über Defekte in der moralischen Entwicklung, die unsere ernststen sozialen Probleme durchdringen. In letzter Zeit haben drei weitverbreitete soziale Skandale den Glauben in die moralische Grundsubstanz der Amerikanischen Gesellschaft erschüttert. Die Deklaration durch Staatliche Beamte zusammengenommen mit dem Aufschrei der Bürger zeigt, dass die Lösung dieser Probleme — und außerdem die Wiedergutmachung der moralischen Fehler der Amerikanischen Gesellschaft — in der Verstärkung der beobachtenden und bestrafenden Komponenten des Superego der Amerikanischen Psyche. Der Autor behauptet, dass die Stärkung der Forderungen des Amerikanischen Superegos nicht die moralische Umformung von sozialen Problemen bewirkt. Er bietet klinischen Beweis, dass jede Gesellschaft seit Anbeginn — einschließlich Gefängnisinsassen — einen starken moralischen Code besitzt — der gutes Verhalten verstärkt. Diese Moralität hat jedoch keine Gesellschaft davor bewahrt, dass Gewaltsamkeit ihrer Mitglieder sich gegen Fremde und Mitbürger richtet. Es wird durch eine Bewertung von klinischen Daten und psychologischen Tests von Adolph Eichmann und anderen Nazis, die in Nürnberg vor Gericht standen gezeigt, dass es zwei gänzlich verschiedene Moralcodes gibt. Einen davon nennt der Autor "refluent" (Superego) Moralität und den anderen "reflektives Bewusstsein" (Bewusstsein) Moralität. Folglich, was den "guten" Nazi und die anderen zerstörerischen Leute unterscheidet war nicht das Fehlen refluenten Moralität sondern ein Fehlen des reflektiven Bewusstseins. Empirische Untersuchungen und literarische Quellen werden angeboten, um anzuzeigen, wie sich Bewusstsein entwickelt und die Faktoren, die dieses entscheidende moralische Gefühl behindern entstehen.

