

Understanding the paths to Malevolence and Benevolence: A case study with corroborating evidence

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The childhood of Adolph Hitler underscores how authoritarian child rearing can set the stage for violent acts in adulthood. Internalization of false narratives is a common mechanism by which repressed fear and

anger from abusive child rearing become manifest in acts of violence. An antidote to the sequence of events leading to malevolent mindfulness is available. Evidence indicates that benevolent mindfulness can be fostered by instituting authoritative parenting and modeling caring behaviors inside and outside the family during growth and development.

Key Words: *genocide; violence; malevolent mindfulness; benevolent mindfulness*

Shoah is the Hebrew word used to designate the Nazi-perpetrated genocide of Jews by the Hitler regime during World War II. Publications have addressed the genocide in political terms and various historical narratives [1-6]. The acceptance of parenting and aspects of the psychosocial development of children as root causes for societies developing a predisposition to genocide and mass atrocities is not commonly discussed. Nevertheless, there are researchers who have maintained that the roots of violence and unspeakable sadistic acts can find their origins in the childhoods of the perpetrators [7-11]. Such information is readily available in translations from the German to English by authors who have studied the life of Adolf Hitler and common parenting practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Germany and Austria. Review of instances of genocide, other than the Shoah, do not reveal such detailed descriptions of child rearing. For that reason, it seems useful to describe the childhood evolution of the Shoah and other similar events from published writings and then postulate probable psychodynamics from the information and recent understandings in neuropsychology. An approach to violence and genocide prevention should then be forthcoming by disrupting the chain of events leading to malevolent mindfulness and supporting parenting practices that set the stage for benevolent mindfulness.

BACKGROUND

There is much evidence that authoritarian abusive parenting was the rule in early twentieth century Germany. There are particularly detailed accounts of the Childhood of Adolf Hitler, the orchestrator of the Shoah. The following narrative has been abstracted from Robert Waite's book *THE PSYCHOPATHIC GOD* [9].

Adolf Hitler's father Alois (AKA Aloys) Hitler was born to Maria Anna Schickelgruber, the unwed daughter of Johann Schickelgruber. The baby was christened Aloys Schickelgruber and at the time, the father's name was left blank in the church records. Alois's mother was serving as a domestic servant in a reportedly Jewish household, when she became pregnant. Hitler's grandmother received money from his possible grandfather until Alois was fourteen years of age. At the end of 1930, Hitler received a blackmail threat that he had a Jewish grandfather. Hitler responded that his grandmother told him she had accepted the money from the Jew because she was poor. Additionally, in 1876 Alois convinced his foster father Johann Nepomuk Hiedler (also written Hitler) to help change his birth records. In the Parish records the name Schickelgruber was crossed out and in the previously blank space, the name "Georg Hitler, Cath. Religion, resident in Spital" added.

Alois Hitler who had only an elementary school education worked as a customs official and achieved the rank of "Higher Collector." Alois had multiple marriages and affairs.

Frau Horl who worked for Alois as a cook after his second wife died stated that he was a very strict man with a terrible temper. After Alois was promoted, he insisted upon being addressed as "Herr Senior Official Hitler" and became furious when referred to with the more usual "Herr Official." Alois was a very heavy pipe smoker. Furthermore, an observer found him to be arbitrary and unfair about his addiction. While indulging himself, Alois would not allow a subordinate to smoke on duty.

Bridget Hitler, the wife of Alois Jr., related what her husband told her about his childhood. Alois Jr. stated that his father had a very violent temper and often beat the dog until it wet the floor. Alois often beat the children and, on occasion, would beat his wife Klara. Additionally, others who knew Alois said that his children never dared to speak in their father's presence, unless told to do so. Moreover, they were not allowed to use the more familiar "du" when speaking to their father, but rather, required to address him as "Herr Vater." Lastly, Alois, just as he did for his dog, was accustomed to putting two fingers in his mouth and whistling for Adolf as opposed to calling him by name.

Adolf described to his secretaries what a cruel person his father had been. A secretary recalled Hitler saying, "I never loved my father, I therefore feared him all the more. He had a terrible temper and often whipped me." One day, as his father beat him with his cane and his frightened mother stood outside the door, Adolf counted the blows without a murmur and proudly reported, "My father gave me 230 blows." After that, he recalled, his father never whipped him again.

Adolf Hitler's mother, Klara Pozl Hitler was said to be Alois's second cousin. Klara was sent to work for Alois as a domestic. Klara was sent away by Alois's consort and later wife, Fanni Matzelberger. Fanni later married Alois, after his first wife died. When Fanni became ill, Klara was summoned back to care for the two children, Alois Jr. and Angela. Fanni died from Tuberculosis, while Klara stayed on to serve in Alois's household. Subsequently Klara married Alois, being about 4 months pregnant at the time. Klara was 25 and Alois 48 at the time of their marriage. Klara had three children. The third child died within a few days of birth. The first two children died at an early age of diphtheria. About 15 months after the death of her third child, Klara gave birth to Adolph on April 20 1889.

Klara was thought to be depressed due to the death of her three children. She also was devoutly Catholic and was postulated to feel significant guilt because of her pregnancy before she married Alois. It is also questioned whether Alois's advances were received according to her free will. At any rate, Klara developed a close relationship with Adolf. It could be that she was worried about losing him similar to her other children. This supportive relationship was manifest in Adolph's later years, when Klara funded Adolph's apartment

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and his attendance at various musical and operatic performances. Such support also provided Adolph with the time to read various antisemitic writings and develop his hatred and scapegoating of Jews.

The internalization of many dehumanizing and demonizing narratives about Jews crystallized Hitler's anti-Semitism as a personal diabolical mission and a political tool. An overview of three narratives used by the Third Reich outlined in Waite's book includes:

The protocols of the elders of Zion

Apparently concocted by unknown authors about 1899 in the Okhrana, the Imperial Russian Secret Police. The Protocols represented an alleged conspiracy of the Jews for world domination. Protocols were used to help foment and justify the pogroms in the beginning of the twentieth century which murdered thousands of Jews. The Times of London in 8/1921 published the first proof that the Protocols were a forgery, however that did not stop the spread of the narrative around the world.

The first "protocol" establishes the thesis that "in laying our plans we must recognize that...civilization cannot exist without absolute despotism" and demands that total political power be given to one political leader. Other protocols proclaim the necessity of "weakening the public mind" and "manipulating the mob" through calculated "all embracing terror," control of the press and education and establishment of a Ministry of Propaganda. Gigantic mass meetings will be held; all those that oppose the dictatorship will have their property confiscated; civil liberties will be granted only to those who support the leader. He will be worshipped as a new god and "his power will excite mystical adoration." Having crushed all domestic opposition, the leader will foment European dissension and set out on a path of conquest and domination.

The Protocols served Hitler both as a primer for his politics and documentary proof of Jewish conspiracy, perfidy and treason. They would serve the same purpose for the schoolchildren of Germany. Two years after Hitler came to power, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion became required reading in all German schools.

The legacy of Martin Luther

Luther's anti-Semitism had lasting consequences. It was set forth in a scurrilous pamphlet entitled *On the Jews and Their Lies*. The tract was widely circulated in Germany and quoted through the centuries. Luther was convinced that Jews were pernicious parasites who exploited and enslaved honest Germans. Germans toiled by the sweat of their brow, Jews "stuff themselves, guzzle and sit around the stove... fart and roast pears (a proverbial expression of laziness) ...they fleece us of our money and goods."

Luther had specific ideas for dealing with "this depraved and damned people of the Jews." Set forth in 1543 and carried out by Hitler in every detail:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools...

Second, I advise that their houses be razed and destroyed...

Third, I advise that their prayer books and Talmudic writings in which such adultery, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them...

Fourth, I advise that their Rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb...

Fifth, I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for Jews...

Sixth, I advise that... all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them.

Seventh, ...Let whoever can, throw brimstone and pitch upon them, so much the better...and if this be not enough, let them be driven like mad dogs out of the Land...

Richard Wagner

Like Hitler after him, Wagner insisted that the Jew was, at the same time, both a cowardly degenerate and a dangerous threat to Germany. He too spoke of the need for "fighting for emancipation from the Jew" because "the Jew in truth the Jew is more than emancipated: he rules." Again, and again he warned that the German spirit was threatened by the cunning enemy: "the utterly alien element of the Jews." What Wagner called "the Jewish problem" was on his mind as much as it was on Hitler's. Wagner stressed the necessity of a "grand solution" and looked forward to the time when "there will be no longer - any more Jews." He also called for a "war of Liberation" against this "enemy of mankind." Wagner believed that "Jewish blood" was

incapable of producing anything of creative value in art, literature or music. In his essay on "Judaism in Music," he ends with "But bethink ye that one thing can redeem you from the curse that burdens you: the redemption of Ahasuerus: Destruction! Here the term Ahasuerus referred not to the Persian king but the legendary Wandering Jew who according to volkisch legend was an evil and insidious being who infected the German people with cholera and syphilis.

Hitler stated: "Side by side with Frederick the Great stands Martin Luther and Richard Wagner."

DISCUSSION

The description of the childhood experiences of Adolph Hitler in the previous section is an example of a case study that is made possible by detailed information collated by Robert G.L. Waite in his book *THE PSYCHOPATHIC GOD* [9]. Although a case study involves a single example, it can provide reliable information leading to a hypothesis about a broader circumstance, under proper conditions [12]. This is especially true when additional supportive evidence is available.

The life history of Adolph Hitler can be described as an extreme case because it is especially problematic. It would seem desirable to grow and develop human beings without such openly declared hatred and violent tendencies. Hitler's story would also seem to be an exemplar of a critical case, since conclusions derived from this case may apply to the vast majority of similar cases. Lastly, Hitler's story may allow us to develop a paradigm about how people come to hate and act out this hatred by pursuing violent acts without the restraints of commonly accepted moral precepts.

It has been argued that an authoritarian form of parenting sets the stage for future aggressive behaviors. It is particularly the corporal punishment and shaming associated with this type of child rearing that produce fear and anger in the offspring so treated. This fear and anger is repressed because of the threat of severe consequences should it be expressed. Thus, these emotions lie dormant in the brain until an opportunity for their release arises in the future [13-15].

Particularly in authoritarian cultures and totalitarian countries, narratives, often false, are repeatedly presented to the citizenry. These narratives then provide the targets onto which the repressed emotions can be projected. Hatred of targeted groups is the unfortunate result. This hatred can then be further expressed in violent actions directed against the vilified groups [16-18].

Adolf Hitler's life story fits the pattern of malevolent mindfulness schematically outlined in Flow Chart 1. The mental maltreatment and physical abuse that Hitler suffered at the hands of his father are well documented in multiple reports and publications [7-9,11]. For a child, fear and anger as the result of such treatment are inevitable. There was only the need for a target onto which these emotions could be projected to complete the descent to hatred and violence. Clearly, the centuries of anti-Semitism in Germany provided the target, not only for Hitler, but for a large segment of the German population. The three abstracted narratives of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Martin Luther and Richard Wagner are ones that influenced Hitler. There were also a number of other anti-Semites whose publications Hitler reviewed and kept in his library [9]. Lastly, it has been postulated that Hitler's genocide that went back two generations of Jewish lineage was a pathologic way of trying to eliminate the "Jewish blood" that he himself might be carrying.

The backdrop underpinning the support by a large segment of the German population to accept Hitler's genocide, first directed against the handicapped "useless eaters" and later against the Jews, was their own authoritarian child rearing and culture to which they were exposed. Additionally, they were repeatedly presented diatribes with varying themes that included religious anti-Semitism such as the deicide charge [1]. There was also secular anti-Semitism exemplified by Eugenics or the Master Race Theory and Jews as vectors for diseases, especially lice and typhus [11,19]. These scenarios were internalized, influencing the masses to support or not oppose the diabolical genocidal plan.

To further understand the malevolent mindfulness displayed by members of the Nazi regime, it would be useful to contrast it with what modern psychology indicates is necessary for benevolent mindfulness, as illustrated Flow Chart 2. Vital to the development of benevolent mindfulness is the establishment of secure attuned attachment between infants and their caretakers. This includes timely response to the infant's needs, eye to eye contact, play and soothing verbal communication. Initially, much of this

verbal communication may seem to evoke only an alerting response, but soon the infant begins to respond both with smiles and sounds. The goal is a trusting relationship. As development proceeds, behavior can be directed in a prosocial manner. This can be accomplished by modeling caring behaviors inside and outside the family [20]. Where discipline is required, non-abusive measures are utilized such as “time-outs” and removing privileges, if necessary. Parental communication through reasoning is the key. Such reasoning is directed at correcting misbehavior by pointing out the consequences of the actions of the children on themselves and others who may be impacted by their actions. This authoritative parenting style is critical to starting the journey of life down the benevolent path [21]. As Andrea Hollingsworth has stated, “Interpersonal relationships marked by conflict, insecurity and distrust can cause us to feel threatened, emotionally deregulated and closed off to empathetic connection with others” [22].

The cordial interpersonal attunement (reciprocal communication) between parent and child is essential for the development of emotional empathy that can be defined as the vicarious sharing of emotions. In contradistinction to emotional empathy, cognitive empathy involves the ability to take another’s mental perspective and see the world from another person’s point of view. The ability to mentalize and be affected by the state of another leads to compassion that includes being empathetically connected with others in their suffering and taking action to relieve their distress [22]. The presence of cognitive empathy without emotional empathy is seen in psychopathy where ruthless persons use others as objects to satisfy their own selfish needs [23-25].

Stifling of emotional empathy is common in abusive child rearing. Such an occurrence provided the backdrop in Nazi Germany for a dual “morality” based on the Master Race Theory [19]. There was life worthy of life that was considered to be defined by white Aryans and there was life unworthy of life represented by all other “racial” groups [2]. These racial “ethics” “valued belonging to the Aryan race at the expense of belonging to the human race and argued against viewing the weak, mentally ill and the terminally ill with exaggerated pity, which it (Nazi theory) blamed on the Jewish-influenced Christian ethics.” [19]

Of course, Hitler used the Master Race Theory to characterize Jews as Untermenschen (literally subhumans). This applied to other outgroups not viewed as part of the Volksgemeinschaft (people’s community). In his mind, in order to prevent contamination of the German genome by these outgroups, certain steps had to be taken. Jews, in particular, were repeatedly presented as parasites living off the German people, purveyors of disease, and a political and religious threat. It was concluded that those who posed such a threat due to their biology could be dealt with in multiple ways to eliminate their perceived contaminating influence. This meant “burning property, looting homes, terrorizing, humiliating, deliberately hurting and even killing were justified as long as these otherwise immoral actions were directed against the enemy camp of “inferior races.” In sum, this was how the dual morality worked. Take care of your own, but the inferior outgroups were fair game” [19].

Another phenomenon that is present in totalitarian societies likely contributed to the carrying out of the Nazi genocide, namely deindividuation. The participation of large numbers of persons in acts of violence lessens the accountability of individuals hidden within the group of perpetrators. Additionally, behaviors in groups become “contagious” and individuals seem to succumb to greater suggestibility [26]. Indeed, there are reports that German soldiers not personally able to join in the murders actually felt ashamed [1].

So, now there seems to be a sequence of adverse psychological events that explain the malevolent mindfulness of Adolf Hitler and a large segment of the population of Nazi Germany. Importantly, there is considerable evidence that the psychodynamics that impacted Hitler and the Nazis also impacted other societies that have traveled the route of authoritarian child rearing followed by hatred of and violence directed at targeted groups. Societal examples of such groups include the Sambia of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea and the Spartans of ancient Greece [17]. Stalin of Russia and Saddam Hussein of Iraq represent individual tyrants with a history of suffering severe child abuse with subsequent exposure to narratives that made violence against targeted groups an avenue for exerting power and expressing their malevolence [17].

A review of other instances of genocide reveals situations compatible with the theory being proposed, albeit not with the detailed information available from the Shoah. For example, there is the Armenian Genocide of the early twentieth century. In his book on the Armenian Genocide [27]. Professor

Ronald Grigor Suny writes, “A Turkish journalist later remembered his “childhood wars” in the Balkans where Muslim children on one hilltop flung stones with their slingshots at Christian children on another hilltop. For hours they fought “as if we were in a national war and continued until we were able to chase the infidel children away. As the enemy withdrew from the war, we spread out onto the mountains with yells, gathered crocuses, and returned to town like heroes who had won wars.” While still children, animosity toward Christians was instilled, and “since we did not know any better, we regarded the Christian children who were infidels as the enemy. They were not (yet) Greeks and we were not (yet) Turkish. Then society was divided into two as Christian and Muslim.” Childhood origins of the future genocide is hinted by this account. Although little information on childrearing is available for the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire or the future Turkey, there is reason to infer that it was authoritarian [28]. Unfortunately, there was a predicted result of the circulating false narratives, as Professor Suny quotes, “Still the collective stereotypes of Armenians as grasping and mercenary, subversive and disloyal, turned them into an alien and unsympathetic category that then had to be eliminated” [27].

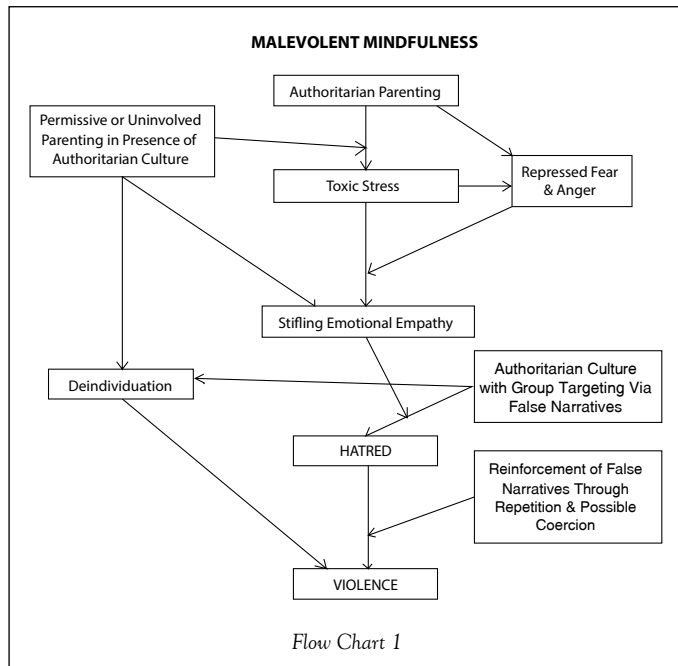
The genocide in Rwanda represents another instance, this time with improved communications, where many countries were aware of the slaughter in real time and did little up front to intervene [29,30]. The Hutus were descendants of one tribe and the Tutsi minority those of another. In her book *Left to Tell*, Immaculee Ilibagiza remarks “Rwandan parents scared unruly children into behaving by threatening to send them to live with the Abashi-it was like being sent to live with the bogeyman...” She also reports that “Young Hutus were taught from an early age that Tutsis were inferior and not to be trusted, and they didn’t belong in Rwanda. Hutus witnessed the segregation of Tutsis every day, first in the schoolyard and then in the workplace, and they were taught to dehumanize us by calling us “snakes” and “cockroaches.” No wonder it was so easy for them to kill us – snakes were to be killed and cockroaches exterminated.” Frequent radio broadcasts depicted the Tutsis as dangerous enemies. Additionally, there was the culture of unbending obedience to authority. Lastly, there was the duress factor where villagers who refused to carry out orders to kill were often branded as Tutsi sympathizers and they themselves killed. So, once the Hutu government armed the Hutus throughout Rwanda and subsequently gave the order to kill, the horrendous slaughter proceeded rapidly. Thus, it is clear that animosities propagated and originating in childhood, coupled with a variety of false narratives, communicated repeatedly, served again as a deadly combination.

Alice Miller in her book *FOR YOUR OWN GOOD* [8] uses the term “poisonous pedagogy” to refer to an authoritarian upbringing that sets the stage for malevolent mindfulness, as outlined in Flow Chart 1. She also remarks that “methods that can be used to suppress vital spontaneity in the child are: laying traps, lying, duplicity, subterfuge, manipulation, “scare” tactics, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliating and disgracing the child, scorn, ridicule and coercion even to the point of torture.” In her research Miller remarks, “Among all the leading figures of the Third Reich, I have not been able to find a single one who did not have a strict and rigid upbringing. Shouldn’t that give us a great deal of food for thought?”

The evidence seems quite clear that the path to malevolent mindfulness has been traveled by many persons on multiple occasions in the history of the world. It is also clear that the alternate path leading to benevolence can be facilitated. Indeed, there is evidence that an evolution in child rearing has occurred over the centuries [31]. The basic problem is that all societies have yet to adopt what Lloyd deMause has referred to as the “helping mode” of child-rearing which is largely synonymous with the authoritative approach. Two questions remain. First, how do we know that authoritative child-rearing is the best approach? Second, how can authoritative parenting be promoted locally and globally?

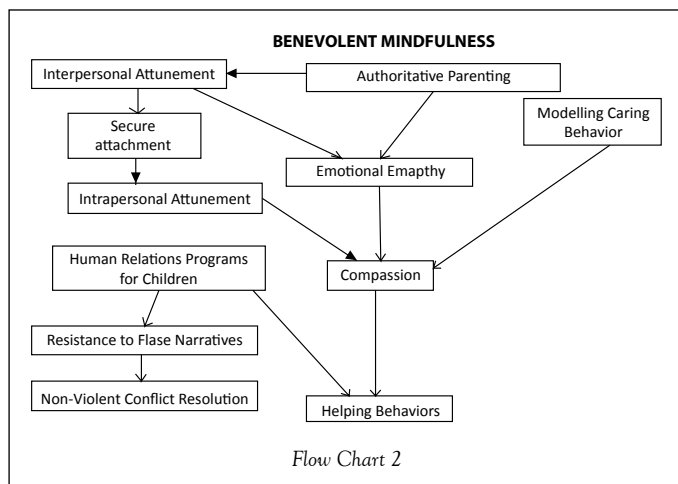
In answer to the first question, it is reasonable to conclude from the study of certain societies that have resorted to violent aggression and the histories of individual tyrants that the poisonous pedagogy of the authoritarian approach must be avoided. PARENTING FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD [14] can occur with the adoption of the authoritative approach. The goal is The Altruistic Personality [20]. The journey to altruism and non-violence can be further facilitated by the institution of Human Relations Programs for Children in school systems [32].

The second question can be answered through the promotion of a process of education. Teams of parenting educators can be developed locally to teach authoritative parenting. Media, including written materials and videos, may be used to facilitate this effort. Globally, this process presents a particular



challenge where certain societies have adopted authoritarian child-rearing and a totalitarian form of governing as their modus operandi. The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child could provide an approach, if governments would facilitate the ability of professionals to provide the necessary education [33].

From multiple sources, it is now apparent that authoritarian child rearing frequently leads to malevolent mindfulness that may become manifest in acts of violence. This abusive child rearing should not be characterized as an excuse to explain antisocial and immoral conduct. Rather, there is now an understanding of a sequence of aberrant psychological events to explain the development of malevolence. Importantly, an alternate path can be fostered for promoting respectful, peaceful human relations. The initiatives required for optimizing the psychosocial development of children and avoiding practices that stifle cognitive and moral development have been outlined. The challenge remains to institute the needed programs.



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