COMMITMENT IN HATE

Adrian SOLOMON[1]

Abstract

Hostility and violence are sometimes regarded as innate, and at other times as acquired, human traits. While this may be true of person-to-person interaction, individuals and groups are often maneuvered through stories of hate into committing acts of aggression against invented enemies on behalf of others. Their latent hard feelings may be "switched on" and upheld for a long time even in the physical absence of the enemy. For better understanding, some examples are provided of political manipulation that takes advantage of this mechanism to pursue objectives that serve group interests, to the detriment of the general population, as well as a possible solution.

1. The aggressive nature of man

Before he published the first major modern critique of human nature, *De Cive*, Thomas Hobbes was also the first to translate from Greek into English *The Peloponnesian War* (1628), whose chapters about the revolt in Corcyra (427 BC) probably gave him much food for thought. Thucydides believed in the predictability of human nature and man's accountability. There is no divine agency in the massacres of Corcyra and the "strangeness of their revenges":

And for seven days together that Eurymedon stayed there with his sixty galleys, the Corcyræans did nothing but kill such of their city as they took to be their enemies […] Amongst whom, some were slain upon private hatred, and some by their debtors, for the money which they had lent them. All forms of death were then seen […] For the father slew his son; men were dragged out of the temples, and then slain hard by; and some immured in the temple of Bacchus, died within it. (Thucydides, III, 81).

The Greek historian saw man's natural inclination for evil and unlawfulness and was pessimistic: such atrocities "shall be ever as long as human nature is the same," although in peacetime they would not normally be accepted. But the most

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[1] Adrian Solomon, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, adisolomon@yahoo.com

shocking aspect of this bleak vision is the total upheaval of commonsense moral values in the process. As a matter of fact, ancient history, like modern history, is rife with episodes of savage slaughter of entire communities.

The drives behind man's warmongering attitude are explored in *De Cive* (1642), where Hobbes explains how experience and observation show that man follows his interests, not his feelings. If man naturally loved fellow humans, nothing would prevent all people from living in harmony – the Stoics' "brotherhood of man." But, like Confucius, who was unable to find even one man attracted by empathy or benevolence, Hobbes sees only people seeking company that provides profit and/or respect, and entertains few illusions about the foundations of society: "So clear is it by experience to all men who a little more narrowly consider Humane affaires, that all free congress ariseth either from mutual poverty, or from vain glory" (Hobbes, 1642: I.II). Discord defines the human condition.

To the selfish craving for profit and respect, Confucius – overall in accord with Hobbes – might have affixed ignorance of the sages' ways; and Hsun-Tzu, in almost total agreement with the same, would have added man's wild unsatisfied desires generating conflict with other men, hence social strife. The known history of civilization, with its continual wars seldom interrupted by ephemeral interludes of peace, attests to the fundamentally bellicose nature of man.

2. The "switch"

Contemporary findings in developmental psychology and cultural anthropology corroborate insights about "human nature" by Enlightenment authors like Rousseau (*Emile, or On Education*) and Adam Smith (*Theory of the Moral Sentiments*). Yale professor Paul Bloom's research confirms that at birth we are equipped with empathy and compassion, with rudiments of justice and fairness, and with a moral sense that makes us capable of distinguishing between "kind and cruel actions":

If you think of evolution solely in terms of "survival of the fittest" or "nature red in tooth and claw," then such universals [the quasi-totality of people naturally disapproving of a certain notion or behavior] cannot be part of our natures. Since Darwin, though, we've come to see that evolution is far more subtle than a Malthusian struggle for existence. We now understand how the amoral force of natural selection might have instilled within us some of the foundation for moral thought and moral action. (Bloom, 2013: 15).

This said, the paleomammalian brain retains an atavistic fear of strangers, an indispensable evolutionary weapon in the struggle for survival. The price consists in that "No one is ever completely free from the paranoid dynamic" (Robins, 1997: 89), which at the national level manifests itself as a nationalistic "paranoid shift"

(Gaylin, 2003: 125). All this seems to vindicate Hobbes's "bellum omnium contra omnes" dictum.

Experiments on blind obedience to authority undertaken in the wake of World War II, such as Milgram's and Bandura's (who coined the term "moral disengagement"), tried to answer the question: To what extent, and in what conditions, are ordinary, psychologically healthy people willing to obey orders from an authority to harm an innocent person? Their research was continued and reinterpreted by the social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, who starts from the assumption that Western civilization is built on the "dispositional" model that places the whole responsibility on an individual's decision to act in one way or another. This conception has solid philosophical, religious and moral grounds, as well as serious social and legal consequences. Modern psychiatry, clinical and personality psychology, as well as the institutions of law, medicine and religion are founded on it (Zimbardo, 2009: 7). Yet, in opposition with the "dispositional" paradigm, which cannot always explain appalling acts committed under social pressure, while still acknowledging the role of free will and responsibility, Zimbardo reveals the external factors that sometimes supersede habitual behavior. Without exculpating the doer, his model brings in the right measure of causal determinism by combining three types of forces: personal, situational, and systemic (Zimbardo 2009: x). The last type resides in institutions which "create mechanisms that translate ideology – say, the causes of evil – into operating procedures". (Zimbardo, 2009: 9) Systems provide the framework, including the authority and the conditions, for situational forces to act in specific ways on behavior. The theory brings into balance systemic and situational forces, such as political or military "categorical imperatives", as well as personal dispositions like sadism or conformism. The conclusions are upsetting, because they dramatically challenge common cognitive biases that place one's self above the moral average (Zimbardo 2007: 261).

Systemic and situational forces are congruent with the idea of causal determinism as a catalyst for dishonest or immoral acts, through abandonment of self-control and personal responsibility. Therefore, an unsettling question arises: Who to condemn, the person or the brain? Even more unnervingly, Michael Gazzaniga, one of the founders of cognitive neuroscience, while reassuring us, like Bloom, that empathy is hardwired in our brains and we are "born to be social", also says that there is no area or network of responsibility in the brain, because responsibility is something that only occurs in social interaction (Gazzaniga, 2012: 193).

Richard Dawkins provides a detailed, sophisticated argument that evolutionary necessity requires genes to be ruthlessly selfish in order to be successful. The reason is that genes compete with their alleles for survival in the gene pool, and those that do better in the competition are to survive and propagate. Even seemingly altruistic behaviors, such as refraining from attacking a rival member of

the same species, are in fact selfish: once the rival A is eliminated, the surviving rivals B, C and others derive benefits and, as a consequence, the act boomerangs on the attacker (Dawkins, 2006: 68).

As constituents of the entire structure that includes the nervous system, genes strongly determine behavior. However, Dawkins provides a caveat: genes are only the "policy-makers", while brains are the "executives" that, by learning and simulation, assume more and more decisions useful for survival (Dawkins, 2006: 60). Although the statistical influence of genes on human behavior is an incontrovertible outcome of natural selection, their influence can be reduced or superseded by education and other cultural acts. The genome is only the background for a multitude of choices made by the individual's consciousness. The view that genetic determinism is not absolute is shared by authors such as the cognitive scientist Steven Pinker in *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2002).

It was observed that non-repulsive emotions (envy, pride, pity) elicited by various social groups are associated with activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, whereas disgust is not. The group that provokes disgust is objectified, i.e. dehumanized through "unconscious neural responses" (Gazzaniga, 2012: 204). What these are is open to debate. "Switch" theories propound a neural (Dozier, 2002: 25) or a psychological (de Waal, 2009) switch that merely turns off empathy in specific circumstances, canceling the inborn inhibition against killing.

Instilling hate and/or disgust is the means to activate the "switch". Sternberg & Sternberg's (2008) duplex theory describes three dimensions of hate: negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment (the triangular theory of hate), complemented by a series of archetypal stories of hate in which enemies play various roles that set off combinations of the components of hate: the barbarian, the stranger, the criminal, the thwarter of destiny, the subtle infiltrator, the power monger "crazed with the lust for power", etc. (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008: 83-95). Manipulation of the elements of the triangle of hate by means of stories of hate create the situational forces – conditions and "operating procedures" – that translate the ideology promoted by the systemic institutions into the field of action.

The easiness with which ordinary people are able to "switch" is alarming to say the least. However, Zimbardo's experiments show that moral disengagement is eventually superseded by a return to "normalcy". As Dawkins would put it, education, in the broad sense, eventually prevails over genetic predispositions. Meanwhile, though, the evil has been done.

3. Fake foes

Natural human impulses aside, situational factors such as competition for resources and power do account for most conflicts. Yet, regimes and specific groups can subdue their opponents and acquire more power by warning against false dangers, which invites the existence of false enemies. Power vacuum too breeds a search for (new) enemies: "When the powerful disappear, someone must be found to blame for the chaos left behind. The accustomed externalization of authority lends itself in this climate to blaming outside enemies". (Robins, 1997: 112)

Enemies are necessary anytime, anywhere. They are necessary in order to define one's own identity in contrast with the strangers', while promoting clichéd ideals such as "national unity", "social cohesion" or "public quiet", all of which make dissent unacceptable. Totalitarian regimes that arm themselves ostensibly to "restore order", brandishing the foreign bugbear all along, just want to keep their population under control, pleading the loftier necessity to deliver overinflated promises of an ideal future. Therefore, where enemies do not exist, they must be fabricated. Just like kids do: not only do they have imaginary friends, but they also invent enemies, an instinctual way of coping with difficult situations and feelings.

Convenient false enemies have been a constant in politics, from the ancient "barbarians", born natural slaves to be subjugated by the Greeks or Romans, or the Spanish Inquisition's *conversos* and "witches", to the modern-day fantasies of some Middle Eastern autocrats, and even "phantom enemies" like political correctness ("For 25 years, invoking this vague and ever-shifting enemy has been a favourite tactic of the right" – Weigel, 2016). In recent Romanian politics, the phantom enemy has attained new records of abstractness: the lineup of the "parallel state" concocted by the ruling party to excuse their assault on the justice system is everybody's guess; not only that, but one may wake up in the morning accused of being part of it, just like in communist times. Ironically, in a parallel world, conspiracy buffs believe that all the enemies are invented: Communism, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the list goes on to span all of America's – and world – history.

Invented enemies may be either real or fictitious, but what decides their fate is whether they are absent or present – and, if present, how far away. Closeness does not seem to stimulate empathy for fellow humans. Mass murders, from Assyria to Rwanda, or staged delirious hate, from Coliseum spectacles to Stalinist and Maoist mock trials, in a court of law or in the midst of a crowd, are all too common. Neighboring countries are the worst enemies. Empathy can be switched off by incitive propaganda (systemic factor), orders given by superiors (situational factor), desire for revenge or mere sadism (dispositional factors). In contrast, others say

from field experience that the emotional trauma or the moral qualms involved in harming another human being are in inverse proportion to the distance: an unseen enemy cannot elicit empathy, precisely because of his invisibility, a statement that can be copiously illustrated with the millions wiped out by artillery and air bombardments. This is how an air crew who has killed hundreds of thousands during World War II deals with the ghastly reality: "Intellectually, they understood the horror of what they were doing. Emotionally, the distance involved permitted them to deny it. (...) From a distance, I can deny your humanity; and from a distance, I cannot hear your screams." (Grossman, 2009: 102). Destroying a remote enemy may amount to no more than a computer game. Whether "switching off" empathy is easier with a present, tangible enemy than with a distant and/or absent one is another matter open to debate. It seems that nowhere is one safe.

The stories exemplified below (faceless foe, subtle infiltrator, thwarter of destiny, power monger) all rely on one element of the triangle of hate: *commitment*, wherein "the goal of those who foment hate is to change the thought processes of the preferred population" (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008: 65), in order to stir up disgust, through some form of brainwashing. Unsurprisingly, indoctrination and censorship infuse a simplistic, black(-and-white) judgment of others and inculcate a self-feeding mindset to those committed to hate. The process both builds up and fades at a slow pace.

4. Goldstein and Soros

In Orwell's *1984*, Oceania's alternate, interchangeable foes, Eurasia and Eastasia, are as palpable as the "exploiting class" in communist countries, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Jews in Nazi Germany (and elsewhere). Eurasians and Eastasians can be caught, tortured, murdered. Nevertheless, the leaders of Oceania's Ingsoc, the ruling single party, create Emmanuel Goldstein, the archenemy, not substitutable with any other, who is never seen, except on a screen during the daily Two Minutes Hate program. The Party needs to keep the proles' anger ready and focused daily on an individual with a face that can easily activate the "switch", because the emotions aroused by an individual ("the sight or even the thought of Goldstein produced fear and anger automatically" – Orwell 1976: 750) do not work as well with many identical enemies. This is a familiar pattern in dictatorships, even though the paranoid way of thinking is sometimes induced: Eurasia and Eastasia, the foreign aggressors, are *faceless foes* with "few distinguishing characteristics" (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008: 87), while Goldstein is plotting from within – he is a *subtle infiltrator*[2].

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[2] The "subtle infiltrator" story was first used in 1927 by Stalin (who rewarded bureaucrats that came up with new "enemies" of the Soviet state) in order to induce hate against groups such as managers, academics, religious leaders, and other members of the intelligentsia accused of conspiring with foreign powers against the young Soviet state (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008: 92).

Although Goldstein is individualized as a lone, unarmed intellectual with the face and voice of a sheep (Orwell, 1976: 749), such harmless attributes are not enough to clear him of the blame for everything that threatens or goes wrong in Oceania. Not only is he a scheming opponent, he also belongs to a group traditionally dehumanized and treated as the qualified suspect – he is Jewish. The classical analogy between Goldstein and Bronstein (Leon Trotsky) that begins with their names and physical traits ("lean Jewish face, with a great fuzzy aureole of white hair and a small goatee beard" – Orwell, 1976: 749) and includes their political views and renegade status fails in two essential, interrelated points: presence and fate. Except for a chosen few, nobody knows for sure if Goldstein actually exists or is rather a product of the Ministry of Truth. He cannot be ill-treated, like Eurasian prisoners, or, for that matter, like his factual alter ego, the flesh-and-blood Trotsky, whose fate was sealed when Stalin decided to do away with him.

Like the collective enemies, Goldstein is visible, but why is he intangible? Presumably because he is a long-run, entirely controllable enemy that can play this role indefinitely. He comes with a great advantage: albeit elusive, his strings can be pulled at will. He can be destroyed over and over. Even in effigy, he is a more effective switch-trigger. Trotsky's fate is shared by the Eurasians waiting to be hanged, but Goldstein is immune.

Absent enemies share a striking feature:

[…] what was strange was that although Goldstein was hated and despised by everybody, although every day and a thousand times a day, on platforms, on the telescreen, in newspapers, in books, his theories were refuted, smashed, ridiculed, held up to the general gaze for the pitiful rubbish that they were – in spite of all this, his influence never seemed to grow less. (Orwell, 1976: 750).

In the same way, despite the devastating media exposure that sometimes surpasses that of athletes and pop stars, the ubiquity of George Soros's influence never seems to relent. Soros is an expedient enemy, activated whenever considered necessary, so his "popularity" varies in ups and downs with contingent interests. He perfectly serves a mentality shared by dysfunctional societies beset by economic failure and/or social unrest. Even so, his financing of human rights organizations and democratic institutions has antagonized governments of all colors far and wide: "The agents of Goldstein had been at work!" (Orwell, 1976: 851). Soros is not just an effigy, yet he is as unpunishable as the incorporeal Goldstein – except by proxy: systematic harassment of Open Society NGOs, of beneficiaries of his scholarships, of the Central European University in Budapest, and so forth. In Russia, "foreign" NGOs were raided by the authorities (Ragozin, 2013). In Macedonia, the nationalistic ruling party (VMRO DPMNE) calls activists in the NGO sector "foreign mercenaries who work against the national interest", and the prime

minister himself is involved in the "de-Soros-ization" plan (Marusic, 2017). In Hungary, his stance on the refugee crisis turned Orban's ultra-conservatives against him, and a law was passed to terminate the Central European University. The country was strewn with billboards reading "Don't let Soros have the last laugh", in their turn scrawled with anti-Semitic graffiti (Than, 2017). In Romania, hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators against a social-democrat government that attempted to pass laws that protect corrupt officials were accused of being paid by Soros to do so, and *The New York Times* (Karasz, 2017) quotes the Romanian prime minister saying that organizations backed by Soros have "financed evil" in Romania. Intoxication in the media has been astronomical. Soros has become, inter alia, a personal enemy of the American president because he funded his opponent's campaign for the White House. Never mind that all of Soros's accusers hold solid majorities in their countries. It may seem ironic, unless one looks back at Orwell's Oceania and Goldstein.

The fact that Soros is pilloried by right-wing and/or nationalist conservatives, social-democrats, and communists alike shows that he is a perfect, i.e. versatile enemy. He can embody several roles defined by Sternberg & Sternberg (2008): having enriched himself by financial speculation (*moral bankruptcy*), he is now "destabilizing" these countries (*thwarter of destiny*) by sponsoring their critics. He is also portrayed as a *power monger* and *controller* bent on ruling the world, and a *subtle infiltrator* whose NGOs allegedly undermine the social consensus, the dream of any autocratic regime. Moreover, his ethnicity brings out the most powerful stereotypes, since he is not only American, but also Jewish. As real as Trotsky, but as unreachable as Goldstein, Soros is as necessary to illiberal regimes as he is to believers in an open society. Neither Goldstein, nor Soros must be eliminated.

5. Eurasia/Eastasia and the US

Eastasia and Eurasia are important insofar as they are able to "switch on" the proles' natural propensity for violence and hatred of otherness. As temporary enemies, Eastasia and Eurasia are indeed exchangeable, subject to yet another kind of switch, that between them. Eurasians and Eastasians are deindividualized *faceless foes*: on the telescreen "marched endless columns of the Eurasian army – row after row of solid-looking men with expressionless Asiatic faces, who swam up to the surface of the screen and vanished, to be replaced by others exactly similar" (Orwell, 1976: 728). (In *Animal Farm*, uniformization and group stereotyping swings between Major's blunt first commandment: "Whatever goes upon two legs, is an enemy" and Snowball's essential principle of Animalism: "Four legs good, two legs bad" – Orwell, 1976: 16, 25.) While Goldstein is absent, hence inaccessible, thousands of Eurasian "war-criminals" are to be publicly hanged on the last day of Hate Week.

Both Eurasia/Eastasia and the US are real with respect to their adversaries, but while the former are often present and suffer physical harm, to Iranians and North-Koreans the US is a conveniently remote foe (some say the reverse may also be true). The tripartite pattern Oceania-Eurasia-Eastasia allows for alliances to be struck up and broken apart easily, but during the Cold War, the stability of the virtual frontline arose from the bipolar pattern of the ideologies confronting each other, and alliances could only be made within one of the two blocs. Since the US has been the only superpower left after the Cold War, not to mention the most prominent exponent of capitalism, it continues to be the world's favorite collective enemy, from Middle-Eastern autocracies to Latin-American dictatorships to a remote remnant of the Cold War: in North Korea, the US has been catalyzing the nation's anger and hate for decades, as America is held responsible for the division of the country (following the inability of the Soviet-American joint commission to reach an agreement after World War II) and the Korean War (which actually started with North Korea invading South Korea on 25 June 1950). Ever since then, North Korean propaganda has depicted America as a "rotten, diseased, pirate nation" (Harris, 2018). During a demonstration in central London, Winston Smith witnesses the following scene:

On a scarlet-draped platform an orator of the Inner Party, a small lean man with disproportionately long arms and a large bald skull over which a few lank locks straggled, was haranguing the crowd. A little Rumpelstiltskin figure, contorted with hatred, he gripped the neck of the microphone with one hand while the other, enormous at the end of a bony arm, clawed the air menacingly above his head. His voice, made metallic by the amplifiers, boomed forth an endless catalogue of atrocities, massacres, deportations, lootings, rapings, torture of prisoners, bombing of civilians, lying propaganda, unjust aggressions, broken treaties (Orwell, 1976: 851).

North Korea has expanded the Hate Week of Oceania into a yearly one-month anti-US event replete with "Fist-pumping, flag-waving and slogan-shouting masses of Pyongyang residents" (Cha 2018). Like Soros, America is a *thwarter of destiny* (i.e. of unification with South Korea), a *power monger* and, when necessary, the *barbarian* and the *criminal*. Factual as they may be, "imperialists" cannot be brought to justice or punished. Not only is the US a more powerful country, it is also a distant, rather abstract foe. While ordinary Americans may not be aware of the scope of this opprobrium, the North-Korean regime keeps hatred at a chronic level, like Ingsoc does with Goldstein, cranking it up whenever a crisis arises. In the post-political Oceania, where ideology is no longer relevant, and nor is the corporeality of the enemy, it suffices to burn Goldstein in effigy. In countries like North Korea or Iran (the latter with a long tradition of effigy-burning), where ideology reigns supreme, the corporeality of the "American aggressors" or the "Great Satan" is not only irrelevant: it is unwanted, because burning an enemy's

effigy again and again prolongs hatred for as long as necessary, while avoiding
pointless risks. Absence serves both parties in the long run, albeit in different ways.

Whether it was for domestic purposes, fear of military intervention by the US, or
strategic reasons, at some point the "confrontational rhetoric" (Reuters Staff 2017)
that arose in 2017 from North Korea's testing of hydrogen bombs and missiles
capable of delivering them had the potential to turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy,
despite the efforts of world powers. After the North Korea-United States summit of
June 12, 2018, vilification of the US subsided, and "Commuters crammed into the
city's rattling red trams no longer pass anti-American images depicting missiles
bearing down on Capitol Hill" (Smith 2018), but shyly consumeristic posters
instead. Anti-American attitudes shifted to third-parties: now it is protesters in
South Korea, the US ally, that allegedly speak of "the struggle against the U.S.
which stands in the way of peace, prosperity and reunification of the Korean
peninsula" (Rodong Sinmun 2018). As it were, Oceania made peace with Eastasia,
and now leaves it to Eurasia to attack its former enemy. Meanwhile, like an
Oceanian, any North Korean may one day turn into the internal enemy to be sent to
a labor camp – or death.

Oceania hangs prisoners of war. One is left wondering what North Korea would do
with its own prisoners.

6. Conclusions

The necessity of the existence of enemies is relevant in a political, rather than a
personal-psychological, context. Enemies may range from individuals or
social/ethnic/religious groups to huge, multifarious and rather abstract entities such
as "the news media" (Grynbaum, 2017).

The attempt to understand apparently motiveless acts of human aggression led to
research on situational factors and to the hypothesis of a neural or psychological
"switch", probably only a very partial explanation. Although the "switch" also
works in the absence of the object of anger or hatred, this does not mean that it is
deprived of sensorial support.

Stories of hate propagated by influential groups, such as governments, are a
powerful switch-trigger, adopted by both authoritarian and democratic regimes, so
long as the stories fulfill a political need. Stories that incite the commitment factor
of the triangle of hate ensure the durability of the feeling of hatred. From the
perspective of politicians, the flexibility and longevity of enemies, whether real or
fictitious, are trump cards that they can play for their own benefit.

Democratically speaking, it is impossible – and probably uncalled for – to eradicate "post-truths" as long as there are credulous people left on this planet. The best solution is to edify them by disclosing throughout mass or social media the workings exploited by "influencers" with political biases. This will eventually benefit the larger population that is constantly being exposed to fake and false news.

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The author

Adrian Solomon teaches English at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, and is also an editor for the Romanian Cultural Institute's publishing house. He founded the quarterly *Plural*, one of the richest sources of writings on Romanian culture and civilization in the English language, and its corresponding website, and he has translated many books, plays and articles from and into English and French.