

Lecture on Nazi Psychology

6-3-45

The most striking thing at the moment for psychologists is that VE day has brought a certain relief, but not this joy of sunrise or new spring of nations beginning.--This almost depressing atmosphere which we see not only in this country. It is due not only to the fact that the war is not yet over. Beyond this gloomy feeling is a certain insecurity -- we do not know what is going on, what history has in mind, what God wants us to do. We are almost like physicians at the sick bed of a patient and we do not know the diagnosis. We are not sure about the nature of the disease, and therefore about the remedy.

What can psychology contribute? Being a psychologist, my contribution has to be on that side. I cannot say anything about the economic side of it. Psychology has split into schools of thought. Mine is the contribution of a very small group -- We-psychology. It is somewhat different from the Jungian.

It is one man's opinion. I almost hope it will not convince you, because that would not be the right psychological procedure. This would be almost a totalitarian attitude. Democratic procedure consists in presenting one man's opinion and where we disagree, saying so. My contribution would be a stimulus rather than a convincing answer. If it would cause you to

wake up in the middle of the night and be angry, that would be most satisfactory.

Naziism, fascism, totalitarianism, dictatorship -- they are almost like a contagious disease. Naziism in its special form is limited to the German nation. Similar diseases we see in Italy. Japan is quite different; it is differently conditioned historically. But total^titarianism is spreading farther. Russian system is a totalitarianism. Dictatorship is even farther spread. What is this kind of disease?

Historically, we should should expect something else, but this destructive thing comes in. Fortunately or unfortunately, we have a parallel in individual psychology. Dictatorship -- we find it in many individuals. There is almost no family, not even in America, where there is not at least one little dictator. Sometimes father or mother -- sometimes one of the boys will be a little Hitler. There seems to be a deeply rooted tendency in human nature in this direction. It always takes slaves to allow a dictator to grow up. A lady had to tell her boy three times to wash his hands; he stuck up his hand, stood at attention and said "Heil Hitler!" What is going on there?

Let us look at the bewildering features of Naziism. It is a contradiction that a so-called educated nation could behave in so primitive a way. The nation as a whole acted historically speaking, in a way that we did not expect at all. This contradiction is the easiest one, because it can be understood in terms of social layers. The German nation has been well educated only

in the upper half of the middle class, and the super-structure, while the lower half of the middle class and the working class was amazingly uneducated comparatively. As long as the educated class was in charge, everything was all right. As soon as the lower strata took over, all the achievements of the upper stratum didn't count any more.

Another contradiction is more bewildering. You can read in American newspapers "Nazi-bolshevism." Many people see some connection, between Naziism and bolshevism. There seems to be a connection between the Prussian way of life and the Russian. How can there be such closeness in these two opposites? You cannot think of two greater opposites than bolshevism and Prussianism, which is feudalism. Still Naziism has a relation to both of them. Both bolshevism and Prussianism are totalitarian in the sense of being intolerant. They do not allow freedom of speech or of religious convictions. If you did not behave in the Prussian sense, you were ostracised. You were not "one of us" -- you had to be Prussian, and that presupposes certain standards. In that sense they were equally totalitarian. In both cases, Russia and Prussia, totalitarianism is based on an almost religious conviction -- we are right, and the others are wrong. We are the elect people. Maybe ten years from now we shall rule the world. If our way of life is right, then we are bound to show our better way of life to them. We must force them to accept the better way. The Prussian junker was convinced that his patriarchal feudal system was the best in the

world. To a certain extent, at a certain time and place -- between 1600 and 1850, I think it was good. But history is going on. It has to be replaced by something better.

Lastly, let's look at the contradiction between the enthusiasm on one side -- almost fanaticism -- and the slavery to which they submitted. The average little Nazi was a slave with very little freedom of making decisions. Economically, he was told what to do. Even whom he should marry -- at least whom he should not marry. On the other hand, they were ready to die for it. It is amazing the amount of courage and fanaticism which they showed. How do these two things go together? All ^{over} ~~of~~ the world, we find that slavery means lack of interest -- possibly rebellion -- destruction of the system which is characterized by slavery. Why is it different with Naziism? This Nazi belonging to the lower half of the nation -- sociologically -- has not learned to be independent and does not want to be -- does not like responsibility. He is glad when someone else takes it for him. He is glad if he is told that he is a member and is a good boy and much better than the neighbors. He is proud to belong to the elect nation and he belongs to the nation so deeply that he is being this. All he is, is being Nazi -- nothing else. He does not think by himself -- he feels as the Nazi parti feels. He experiences the collective emotions -- waves largely originated by propaganda, but still genuine emotions. This is fullness of life for the ordinary man. He is so poor regarding thoughts and criticism that he is willing to die for this.

It is an adolescent attitude. We should understand this. Our adolescents like to be guided that way. If they only had guides -- good leaders of youth who could arouse their enthusiasm, making decisions for them, they would unite the youth of the nation behind these leaders. But then of course the task would be what the Nazis never considered -- to lead the youngsters beyond this into responsibility. The Nazi could not and would not do that.

It looks as though this belongs to the lower half of the nation. Second, it belongs to a more or less juvenile inner attitude. It is related to leadership and followers.

In European history you will find east and west of Germany two examples, different and still similar -- Bolshevism in 1917-18, and on the other side, the French revolution of 1789. But both national movements were very bloody and cruel, similar to Naziism -- still they were forward movements. They did away with something obsolete. They led in the direction of history. The final result might be very bad, but these revolutions destroyed something obsolete. This is not true regarding Naziism. What was there before Naziism came might have been bad, but it was better than Naziism. Naziism was not only juvenile but also medieval -- a relapse.

There was another movement in European history, which is almost embarrassing....inquisition. It can be compared with Naziism because of the recklessness and systematized cruelty. The inquisition was superimposed from above. The leaders did this to the nations on

purpose over years and years; it included very bloody wars and innumerable executions. This systematized cruelty reminds us somewhat of the concentration camps. Most of us will agree that the inquisition was reactionary. They tried to protect history against progress. They tried to cut off the people who wanted to go ahead. Imagine Europe in the year 1200. Out of this some people emerged -- those who wanted to be independent. The executionary cuts off their head. They want to keep the ~~xxx~~ whole bunch inside the bag. This ~~xx~~ is similar to the motive of Nazi cruelty. Still there is a difference. The Inquisition was led by thinking people who had a philosophy and thought they knew what they were doing, and acted cold bloodedly, while the Nazi acted unreasonably on mere emotion. This was much more primitive.

Naziism seems to be a historical movement like a popular outburst of primitive power, somewhat similar to a revolution, but going back in history. Has there ever been anything like that in history? No.

Let us look at the case history of this patient: the German nation. What led up to Naziism? There were about the beginning of our era those Teutonic tribes. They challenged the Roman Empire. These tribes had almost no religion. Their home religion decays while the tribes migrate. Only a very high religion can be carried through a migration. They had no books; they forgot their old religion. They became more religious, and finally were open to Christianity. They still had their belief in Wotan -- god of the strong -- the god who made the trees shake at night.

The Christian missionaries had an easy time superimposing Christianity on this. All of these tribes were "Christianized." It was a mature religion superimposed on these youngsters. It was like teaching higher mathematics to children. The early Middle Ages were miserable. The superstructure of Christianity was one thing; underneath was the wild old god of the storm, repressed, degraded. He still represented the original power -- the un-lived life of the people. He rebelled against Christianity. Finally the Catholic church opened the crusades. There those youngsters, brought up under too strict a regime, were able to find an outlet. But the crusades were not enough; so they killed each other. A further development of Christianity took place; Eckhardt was somewhat beyond the Catholics, and had to be beheaded. The repressed power of a half-Christianized nation wants to come out. It wants to create a higher form of Christianity and official government of the church; but the church cannot allow it. 200 years later, it came out in the Reformation.

The Lutheran Reformation comprised two movements, one going ahead. Religious responsibility is shifted from the group to the individual. I am responsible even for my church. Up to that time the church took care of the individual. Now the individual must take care of the church. This is progress. In psychological language -- individuation; the dignity of the individual; renaissance. But at the same time it was nationalism.

Nationalism was going back -- giving some freedom to the old demon Odin, who was still imprisoned under

adolescent; and knew the rank of the nation. It was much more pleasant to stop thinking. The Communists always said things to make you think. Who can read Das Kapital? This howling -- somehow you felt the response in your own diaphragm. This power that he appealed to -- primitive, juvenile, collective -- was present within each one. The educated ones knew how to deal with these powers. Most of them were not caught. The majority of the nation heard the howling and started howling too, and it was very easy to organize these howling wolves. The wolf is a symbol of underlying, uneducated, primitive force. The Prussian peasantry love the wolf. It is not by chance that the U-boats were called wolf packs, and the name Wolf is a frequent name for boys in Germany.

The gentry never recognized Hitler as an equal. He was an upstart -- he never was "invited." They called him "Wölfchen." He did not understand this; thought it was a compliment. I know that someone called him this openly, and he thought it was a joke and was pleased. In the deeper sense it was an expression of his inferiority. I read that the song that he loved most was Disney's "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?"

In such a case, someone becomes such a symbol. He was taken in by this power. They projected it -- he found it within himself, and accepted this.

If you have a herd of wolves, you can organize them. Wolves never think. They just run and howl. But it broke down. If I am right that Naziism is the outburst of primitive collective power from the lower and even the

lowest stratum of society, then this power is neither good nor bad. It has taken a very negative form in this case, but the power itself is not bad. It can be used on a constructive way. Think about the Reformation -- the power was released and used for progress., establishing religious self-responsibility. This time a much deeper, greater power has been released. If the adequate movement in a positive way would come in -- a spiritual movement -- perhaps Eckhardt -- something very great could ensue. If a nation is exhausted like this, it may be possible that nothing will happen -- a nation may bleed white and disappear. Then it is all right. Other nations will take over. If the power is still there, it will come out.

Since this power possibly is still there, we have to see to it that it is not misused again, so the other nations have to see to it that no rearmament takes place -- no relapse into militarism is possible. Beyond this, almost nothing can be done. Who can handle this power? Nobody knows anything about it. Whatever will be done will be wrong. Give them the facts, the right kind of information which has been withheld from them for ten or twenty years; keep them from re-armament, and if they are still the creative nation, a great new wave -- certainly a religious wave -- will follow. If not, then the book is closed.

