THE REAL CAUSES OF WAR BEYOND THE MULTICAUSAL APPROACH

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Psychology can be regarded as very subversive when it enters the arena of power politics (Carl Rogers, 1977).

"How exactly does it happen that normal human beings, all endowed with a conscience, an awareness of their individual responsibility for their judgment and choice of truth over untruth, reason over irrationality, justice over injustice and morality over sin, – manage to justify in their own eyes even the most inhuman atrocities and acts of self and others mass-destruction?"

My own 30-years long systematic effort to find good answers to questions such as *"By virtue of what mechanisms do we turn human 'others' into enemies?"*, begun with a war trauma. I managed to recover out of it only when I found the answer to the question "what causes wars" that I felt was true, based on what I realized were the *real* causes, unlike my earlier conventional conceptions about the causes of wars that suddenly seemed completely inadequate. Since then I adopted the "Direct Causation Approach" that requires focusing on the *direct-physical* causes of a life-threatening condition inside the human organism.

Following that approach, I begun focusing on the inner-psychological space in which ideas governing war-oriented thinking and motivation existed. The result has been a detailed description of the mental mechanisms operating in war-oriented normal people I called Theory of Dehumanization. To the best of my belief and as far as my experimentation and experience have confirmed it deciphers the code of human politically-ideologically motivated destructive intergroup behavior. Its applications make healing possible.

My message to the community of scholars working on psychological interpretation of war is therefore the need to keep the Direct-Causation Approach in view if they intend to become a "helping profession" in a reality of politically motivated destructiveness rather than only understand and explain it. The first part of this essay will make the argument for following the Direct Causation approach. The second part will present the process and results of my own taking it -- the Theory of Dehumanization and its applications.

In July 1970, on the Syrian front, the army ambulance I navigated to a UN outpost was hit and all my companions were torn to pieces. Traumatized, I could not erase the sensory experience of those moments from my inner vision, as if it were happening in the present and projected on my mind's screen again and again. I wanted to get over it, but I became convinced--perhaps obsessed--by the thought that

I would not be able to go on living without coming to understand, but *really* understand, *why* it had happened.

I could not find the real causes in anything I had learned about the causes of war. My conceptual maps pointed in directions that stroke me as erroneous and irrelevant. Historical causes, economic causes, complex causes: two peoples clashing over the same territory, the Arab belligerence, occupation of that Syrian territory by my country Israel, all those together...   None of them directly caused the very real effect I experienced that afternoon. In addition, all those causes and myriad others seemed arbitrary, chosen arbitrarily, each an effect in an endless chain of earlier events, earlier "causes".

In my first *new* realization, the missile reached us at the end of a chain of causation beginning in Biblical times with the conquest of the Land of Canaan by the Hebrews--actually much earlier--propelled through endless links of causes turned effects turned causes, down to the causes for emergence of modern science that enabled some distant people to devise the chemical reaction and construct the technology that caused the explosive material in the missile to turn my companions into bloody splinters.

I got over my trauma when the *real* cause, so it felt, presented itself to my awareness. The real cause was the obvious one: the Syrian gunner on the other side wanted to hit us, his target, aimed well and pulled the trigger. Had he not wanted to hit us at that moment, he would not have to.

Why do I call that the "Real" cause? Because if there is any link in the chain of causation leading to war that is *not* abstract, that we can not just conceptualize but touch in order to break that chain, the living human link is the only one touchable. In the most real, concrete and functional sense, we could not have wars if people did not fight willingly being convinced that they should. The 9/11 terrorists did it in full consciousness, feeling justified in face of their conscience, morality, history, religion, society. Otherwise, they would not have done it, would they? -- If all other contributing factors remained equal but people would just not conceive shooting and bombing and burning and killing as an option to solve their problems with other people, there could be no war. Thus, by only describing events taking place in the nonverbal world, we arrive at an awareness that is very uncommon in our and other cultures: the real causes of wars are not abstract but living people.

Economic, Political, or Historical Causes are abstract constructs. In reality, all we can ever observe is some people sending other people to war because of what they, inside their skulls, conceptualize as their "Economic Interests" or whatever, usually their concepts about the malice of and danger imminent in the "enemy". As long as we do not act consistently upon that simple truth, we could see or experience endless horrors and suffering, unable to touch their real causes.

This down-to-persons awareness of causation brought me to the realization that if anyone wanted to heal infectious societal diseases

such as wars, they would need to investigate human thinking that causes it *directly*. Then I begun to learn all I could from reliable scientific sources about the processes by which warring people perceive and construct their political realities. Very soon I learned that this field was completely dominated by the *multiple causation approach*. It meant, that if my realization that the relevant causes for making a difference are the *direct* ones was valid -- that multiple-causation approach was in itself the cause why research in the area is bound to be ineffective.

In the 1958 seminal work of Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice, the multiple causation approach was postulated very emphatically, "as forcefully as possible":

> **Are discrimination and prejudice facts of the social structure or of the personality structure? The answer we have given is both. .. And we emphasize once again, as forcefully as possible, that a multiple approach is required. ...help comes from Historical, Sociocultural, and Situational analysis, as well as from analysis in terms of Socialization, Personality Dynamics, Phenomenology, and finally, but not least important, in terms of actual Group Differences. To understand prejudice and its conditions the results of investigations at all these levels must be kept in mind... there is no other way. (p. 476.)**

Let there be no doubt, that what Allport refers to as "discrimination" and "prejudice", is the same state of mind as war-orientation (in the same year federal troops were sent to protect black students in the newly integrated schools and the governor of Arkansas declared "This is now an occupied territory"). But Allport was very optimistic about the future of *"the infant science of human conflict"* which was, he felt at the time, "*thriving*". Nearly half-century later that science was still following the multiple-causation approach but the mood has been pessimistic all around. Neil Kressel, one of the leading American scholars in the field of Political Psychology wrote in the last decade of the 20th century "*There probably remains some residual frustration and disillusionment growing out of the field's collective inability to make much difference in the world*"). Worse, "*..no straightforward and consensual psychological science has arisen to meet the needs of political scholars. Instead, modern psychologists, sociologists, and biologists forge competing images of human nature and a convergence of outlooks appears unlikely in the foreseeable future"* .

In contemporary studies, psychologists uphold this multiple-causation approach and build abstract models. They insist, as if anyone was in a danger of forgetting it, that *"at all points, political and psychological studies are inextricably intertwined"*. The pessimistic view of what lies ahead may be summarized in the words of the Dutch researcher Johan van der Dennen, who is reputed for having amassed over 100,000 sources on political violence: "*In retrospect it seems clear*

that the phenomena dealt with can be approached from so many different points of view, from so many disciplines, and on so many levels, that a unitary comprehensive theory is hardly to be expected in the near future".

In view of the fact that war is a consciously motivated human behavior, the idea that, since "*political and psychological studies are inextricably intertwined"* (above) they are qualitatively not different from one another, could be based on a fundamental methodological error. The "intertwined" causes are not all the same: some are *real-direct* causes motivating people, other are *indirect causes* that might or might not affect them.

The assumptions we make about causation govern our approach to changing the condition. In medicine, or in any *helping* profession, without knowing the physical or closest-to-physical psychological agents — viruses, germs, neuroses, etc. —we cannot deal with critical factors in changing the condition. Changing only the *indirect* causes of illness, such as economic conditions, nutrition or sanitation, we practice hygiene and hopefully prevent the spread of disease. But hygiene is not medicine and prevention is not healing once the human organism becomes infected. As I submit this essay to you, I still feel rather lonely in my feeling that the mainstream research has failed to follow that simple principle of scientific approach that stipulates, that in order to help a human condition one must first and foremost ascertain the DIRECT-physical causes. We need to change that multi-causation approach before we could make a difference.

Having chosen the direct-physical causation approach, I begun by looking at what was obvious in the behavior of racist, ethnocentric, nationalistic, etc. bigots, fanatics and single-minded supporters of all war operations (my living environment is a perfect laboratory for becoming a participant-observer). First, since under all multiple conditions and influences *people commit organized violence against other people consciously*, I decided that the organ I should investigate in order to locate the *direct* quasi-physical causes of warlike thinking and behavior is the conscious part of the mind, the socially acquired system of Orientation.

Moreover, anywhere in the world and no matter how absurd and evil in my and your view, the fanatics of conflict *must have a moral justification* for what they believe and what they do, same as the rest of us. The perpetrators of socially sanctioned evil anywhere behave as if they were under compulsion to believe they are right and their enemies are wrong. I therefore began investigating how they manage; how *exactly* they manage to massacre or victimize helpless victims without compromising their own highest human values. I reasoned, that if I could interfere with their rationalization or self-justification system it would be like interfering with the *direct* causes, which is what one must do if one wishes ever to develop some remedies. Since *"Conceptions of*

right and justice form an inescapable part of the context of political_ reasoning", I surmised that if I could find ways to undermine that justification system I would effectively neutralize the effects of the "virus" — a hope that in my private experience has been sustained beyond my own expectations.

The <u>research-questions</u> leading to the Theory of Dehumanization were formulated on the lowest possible level of abstraction: *"How exactly does it happen that normal individuals, all possessing a conscience, an awareness of their individual responsibility for their judgment and choice of truth over untruth, reason over irrationality, justice over injustice and morality over sin, – manage to justify in their own eyes even the most inhuman atrocities and acts of self and others mass-destruction? In what ways exactly they are different from others (me)? What exactly, if anything, can be objectively defined as wrong with them? Which of their organic functions of perceiving, thinking, and telling right from wrong, are affected? How? How does it happen? When?* — The theory of Dehumanization embodies answers to all those questions.

<u>The evidence</u> regarding beliefs\thinking about war and conflict was collected from public communication media in Israel over 25 years. It was found that war-oriented thinking patterns universally conformed to one basic orientation structure: "We Always Good\Right – Them Always Bad\Wrong\Guilty". That fantastic structure is made possible by the uniquely human capacity for endless abstraction helped by two mental mechanisms. One mechanism molds all incoming information into a number of specific, fixed and recurring, universal patterns in conformity to the "We Good—Them Bad" orientation.

The other mechanism, Blind Areas, turned out to be a major <u>discovery</u> in the researching process. It has been found with astonishing significance that persons, who consistently expressed their views in patterns that conformed to the "We Right Them Guilty" cognitive map of social orientation, practically never (sic!) gave expression to any awareness of even the most obvious human realities that did not conform to that map. For example, the evidence indicated, that not one leader or spokesperson in the Israeli national consensus uttered, over a period of 20 years, a spontaneous expression of warning that we might be forgetting that "Them" are not one hostile entity but many different individuals, men women and children, not all bad and many suffering in this conflict (the "national consensus" designation applies to the authorities, the establishment, all sources except those who were repeatedly referred to in political discourse as "Bleeding Hearts" ("Lefties", "Defeatists", "Self-hating", etc.).

Not one consensual voice uttered a spontaneous expression of awareness, that having to forcefully rule over the Palestinians could be dangerous for the moral soul of Israelis; or that any of the suppression\punitive measures against "Them" were unjustified or too

much; or that any of the (thousands) military operations of all kinds were unnecessary or excessive; or that some aspect of our stand against them could be not exactly right; or that some third-party mediation effort toward resolution of the conflict should not be seen as a threat, or that we could open some initiative toward reconciliation, etc. – blind areas in place of obvious human realities. That finding was fully confirmed in texts referring to war in other cultures past and present.

The Theory of Dehumanization organizes the identified Blind Areas and Patterned Beliefs in ten headings: 1)We, 2)Them, 3)Bleeding Hearts, 4)Deviants, 5)Captives, 6)Leader, 7)Strategy, 8)Other Nations, 9)Morality, 10)Time. Corresponding Blind Areas and Patterned Beliefs are listed under the ten headings and comprise the Dehumanization Syndrome, a list of symptoms that makes the condition operationally definable like any other psychological condition (only, it is felt, with far greater precision). Analysis for Dehumanization is performed by first classifying one's verbal expressions (the relevant behavior of politicians is open, public knowledge) under each of the 10 headings of the Syndrome and then comparing them to the Patterned Beliefs. Individual diagnosis is made by noting, in addition, one's inattention (over a length of time) to the realities covered in Blind Areas.

Space does not permit presenting the whole list of symptoms. Some examples of Blind Areas follow (the corresponding Patterned Beliefs can be easily imagined):

WE: The fact that "We" (the Nation, the People, the Country) is an abstract term, that in reality only individual human beings exist.

THEM: Their (same as ours) humanity and individuality

BLEEDING HEARTS: The fact the WE (the nation, the people) and our leaders (leadership, government, ruling party) are not the same thing, and therefore opposing the government may not necessarily be against the nation while supporting the government could be.

STRATEGY: The possibility, that the best tactics in certain situations is not using force; the possibility that the best tactics is making a conciliatory move.

MORALITY: The moral obligation itself: measuring whatever we do to them and they do to us with *the same* yardstick.

TIME: The fact that history, past, and future have no meaning other than in the perception and thinking of people living in the present.

The Dehumanization Syndrome embodies the informed answer to the question how people can be so irrational and immoral in a war situation: Their perception mechanism filters out into Blind Areas all evidence that could lead them to the realization that in fighting and killing they may not be doing the right thing. The direct cause of unjustified wars is not what bigots, fanatics or warmongers believe; it is

what they do not think of and do not even perceive, like their own fallible humanity, or the "enemy's" individuality and equal humanity, or that the reality that justified war and enmity could change in time. Blind Areas effectively protect the dehumanized against experiencing any "cognitive dissonance" in committing even the worst war crimes.

The full Dehumanization Syndrome, which is list of symptoms, the tool for analysis and the map of the inner space of politically dehumanized minds will be sent by the author to all upon request.

The Theory of Dehumanization claims to present the so far unattained breakthrough in social theory, because bringing those areas of mental blindness to human awareness affects the *direct* inner causes of the condition. The Blind Areas and Patterned Beliefs could be compared, in terms of organic quasi-physical existence, to virus or software programmed in the mental mechanism. Interfering with people's Orientation System would be analogous to healing; whilst all other known methods of prevention of intergroup prejudice and enmity (improving political, geopolitical, social, economic, or educational conditions, etc.) manipulate factors that *indirectly* affect the beliefs and actions of people and therefore could have, at best, the effect of preventive sanitation measures.

Secondly, the Dehumanization Syndrome as an analytical tool makes the condition objectively identifiable and definable in terms of specific individual expression and behavior, and so it can be approached, understood, and discussed scientifically as a psychological state of mind, beyond the present level of political discourse in our culture that regards various manifestations of Dehumanization, prejudice, racism, fanaticism etc., as a matter of personal opinions and values (practically never owned, always projected on some others), which lie beyond the reach of objective scientific assessment. Applications in education, culture, "Peace Studies", political discourse and political prediction are such that, in my limited experience, justify the hope that intergroup conflicts and war as we experience them could now begin to become things of the past.

The Theory of Dehumanization deciphers the code of destructive political behavior in conflict by discovering that its motivational drive (the overriding "interest") is the need to maintain one's orientation (identity) system in working order (Blind Areas exist to prevent it from collapsing in face of human reality).

Behavior of public figures identified as dehumanized can be predicted, with great accuracy, to be in conformity with any of the Patterned Beliefs, including Strategy (*"The way to deal with Them is force"; "If force has not worked more force should be applied"*). Many common illusions regarding "peace process" and errors of conventional political analyzers could be thus avoided. On the other hand, even a single spontaneous expression of awareness of reality covered in a

Blind Area, uttered by a person who was formerly diagnosed as dehumanized, predicts (with very high probability) a radical turn-around in his\her attitudes about the conflict.

When children are old enough to learn that there have been WE and THEM, wars, heroes and villains, victims and perpetrators, etc., they are probably old enough to learn that there has been Dehumanization, the most dangerous of social epidemics which they should become able to identify in themselves and in others. The Dehumanization Syndrome would make the concept definable, its symptoms identifiable in the here-and-now, applicable to any historical, literary or contemporary text analyzed in a classroom as well as to any real-life situation including one's own. Students should learn the truth—relative to the best knowledge of their teachers—about politically-ideologically-religiously motivated human irrational and destructive behavior, by the same logic they learn the truth about sex, evolution, history, and whatever is considered the truth to be passed on to the next generation.

In teaching historical, literary, and contemporary political texts, content analysis for identifying the Patterned Beliefs may be introduced. Content analysis for signs of awareness of any of the Blind Areas is particularly recommended, since it would help the analyzers to become aware of any such Blind Areas within themselves. By applying the Theory of Dehumanization, even single classroom teacher, without any technical gear or costly apparatus, could effectively arrest and prevent the development of dehumanized thinking and feeling patterns in her or his students.

As the dehumanized system of orientation has been found to be entirely dependant on its Blind Areas, prevention and healing methods bring those Blind Areas into awareness. The single technique found most effective is asking open questions about realities hidden in the Blind Areas. This technique circumvents resistance since it does not question the dehumanized beliefs about "THEM", but rather points at human realities in the territory and in oneself, and asks persons, who normally avoid paying attention to it, what they make of it. By that, it helps them fill-in into their cognitive maps the human realities that were missing there.

To what extent and how soon such educational practices will free people and their systems from prejudices and warlike orientation? To what extent would war be regarded as an option for resolving conflicts in a society of members who are aware of the dangers of Dehumanization and are skilled in identifying its symptoms in their environment of communicated ideas?— I can only hope some of you will try to implement it in order that we all may find out.

Recommended Readings

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