

Chapter 1

Wrestling with the Inner Demons of Contemporary Life: A Brief Overview of Psychoanalytic Thought



We begin our examination of Enlightened Leadership by exploring a number of Psychoanalytically based theories, in particular with regard to what they have to teach us about the human condition. Thus, we briefly examine some of the key concepts and ideas of Melanie Klein, Sigmund Freud, Donald Winnicott, Eric Berne, and John Bowlby. One of the major benefits is that they illuminate important aspects of the Coronavirus that are difficult to ascertain otherwise. For one, each provides a different take on the enormous stress we are experiencing as a result of the Virus. They also reinforce the absolute necessity of following the dictates of reputable scientific experts and science itself if we are to stand any hope at all in dealing with the Virus.

1.1 Melanie Klein

Splitting

Melanie Klein is, without a doubt, one of the most influential Child Psychologists/Psychoanalysts of all time.¹ Through meticulous observations of how young children actually played with dolls representing the major figures in their lives, namely, their parents, close relatives, grandparents, siblings, etc., Klein was able to witness the great distress and inner conflicts that young children experienced during the first years of their lives. As a result, she essentially created the field of Child/Play Therapy.

¹Phyllis Grosskurth, Melanie Klein, Her World and Her Work, Jason Aronson, Inc., New Jersey, 1986.

It is said that if Freud discovered the child in the Adult, then Klein discovered the infant in the Child, thus pushing back even further our understanding of the roots of human behavior.

In a word, very young children experience extreme anger and frustration over the fact that they don't have complete control over the primary caretaker who is responsible for feeding them both physically and emotionally. When Klein wrote early in the twentieth century, this was primarily the mother. Fathers generally did not play as much of a role as they do now in both the physical and emotional care and feeding of their children.

Under the age of 2 or 3, children literally Split the image of the mother into a "Good Mother" who cares and administers to the child's every need exactly when the child wants it and a "Bad Mother" who has to discipline the child and can't be there precisely on time and when the child demands it. Because its mind is not yet developed and mature enough, it can't comprehend, let alone accept, that the "Good" and the "Bad Mother" are one and the same person. To the young child, there are two separate and distinct mothers.

Splitting is in fact the basis of the world's great fairytales. Thus, the "Bad Mother" is the Evil Witch or Cruel Stepmother, and the "Good Mother" is the Good Witch or Fairy God Mother. Fairytales have an ever-lasting appeal for children, and even adults, because they allow one to play out harmlessly their fantasy of killing the Evil Witch, i.e., "the Bad Mother." In this way, they allow children to experience what they cannot verbalize at this stage of their lives.

The Paranoid-Schizoid Position

Klein termed this earliest stage of human development "the Paranoid-Schizoid Position," "paranoid" because the young child was deeply afraid that the parent would either abandon or hurt him or her, and thus not meet the child's needs at all, and "schizoid" because of Splitting.

Most children naturally develop out of this earlier stage, but some form of Splitting and paranoia stay with us our entire lives. Indeed, in times of extreme stress or threat, we shouldn't be surprised to find people regressing to the Paranoid-Schizoid Position. This is exactly what has happened because of the Coronavirus.² Aided by the Internet, it's allowed Dis- and Misinformation about who and what is responsible for the Virus to spread around the globe at virtually the speed of light. And, once out there, like the Coronavirus itself, they are extremely difficult to eradicate. We explore Dis- and Misinformation in detail in Appendix 2.

²Max Fisher, "The Infectious Danger Of Conspiracy Theories," The New York Times, Thursday, April 9, 2020, p. A10.

The Depressive Position

Klein also identified a subsequent, follow-on stage of human development: The Depressive Position. At this point, the child finally recognizes and accepts that the “Good” and the “Bad Mother” are one and the same. The child also accepts that there is good and bad in everyone, especially in him or herself. For the time being, the child moves beyond Splitting. Klein termed this stage “Depressive” because the child remembers and thus feels bad about its previous hostility toward its mother.

Of course, all of this takes place subconsciously. One certainly cannot explain it to the undeveloped minds of children. And, one cannot necessarily explain it to adults as well, especially those who are under the grips of Splitting.

The Paranoid-Schizoid Position and Donald Trump

With his constant division of the world into friends versus enemies, plus his extreme vilification of anyone who is not with him 100%, Donald Trump is a perfect illustration of someone who is under the constant sway of the Paranoid-Schizoid Position. Indeed, he is a constant walking-talking, living-breathing model of it.

Trump’s supporters are also deeply under the throes of Splitting. They are simultaneously both “victims” and “villains.” They are “victims” in that they feel “deeply aggrieved” by those who act “superior and put them down.” As a result, they feel enormous hostility and, thus like Trump, become “bullies” and thereby “villains” in response. The Split is fundamentally due to the fact that they have little understanding that they are caught between two powerful and opposing forces.

One of the most critical things to understand about the Paranoid-Schizoid Position is that when one is under its grips, all thinking—rational thought—ceases to exist. One is constantly in a state of extreme paranoia accompanied by unrestrained Splitting. Thus, everything is potentially if not a real enemy. One’s true friends, if any, are few and far between. And, the forces of evil are literally everywhere. Saddest of all, while one desperately needs adults to come to one’s aid and rescue, the Paranoid-Schizoid Position makes it impossible to trust anyone. No wonder why Trump pushes all adults away, those who could really help him, and us by offering constructive criticism of poorly thought out, impulsive actions, and policies.

Dangers to Society

To say that the country as a whole is deeply in the throes of the Paranoid-Schizoid Position is putting it mildly. Republicans and Democrats generally feel nothing but loathing and outright contempt for one another. Splitting is both the cause and effect

of the extreme polarization we are experiencing. It's been made worse by Republican Senators rushing through a successor to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

We desperately need national leaders who can embrace the ambiguity that is necessary in acknowledging that there is good and bad in all of us. The late Senator John McCain stood out in this respect. While he obviously had basic disagreements with Democrats, he was not automatically willing to write off everything President Obama did and said, especially his calling out the Russians for interfering in our elections and his support for Obamacare. And, on occasions, Senator Sanders has shown himself able to listen to Trump supporters without entirely dismissing them or their concerns. Nonetheless, even he has been prone to Splitting with his "my way or the highway" attitude, and especially with his previous harsh attacks of former Vice President Biden. So has Senator Warren in this regard. Nonetheless, to his credit, Senator Sanders has been a strong supporter of President-Elect Biden.

Make no mistake about it. Splitting is as harmful to society as any threat. Unless more national figures are willing to come forward and reaffirm one another, then we see no hope whatsoever of moving to the Depressive Position. Without this, we don't know how "any house so Split can survive." To his enormous credit as well, President-Elect Biden has said time and again that he wants to heal the country and thus move beyond Splitting.

Finally, Splitting makes it impossible to make intelligent distinctions for to Differentiate is not the same as Splitting. For instance, not all brands of Socialism are the same. There are crucial differences between Socialism as practiced in Communist countries and Scandinavian, i.e., Social Democracies. Thus, Social Democracies are not inherently opposed to the holding of private capital and so-called Free Markets. Rather, they believe in putting strong social restraints and safety nets on the worst excesses of Predatory Capitalism so that the poor do not suffer unduly from gross inequalities when it comes to Education, Healthcare, Housing, etc.

Needless to say, with the extreme vilification and the vilest language directed toward those Governors and Public Health Officials who have suggested, and in many cases ordered, people to shelter in place, they have been subject to the worst aspects of Splitting. They have become "evil incarnate!"

There is another aspect which is just as troubling. Because many Health Workers are rightly in fear of transmitting the Virus to their children, upon returning home, they have deliberately refrained from holding and thereby comforting them. The fear is that this will sadly rekindle new episodes of Splitting in young children.

1.2 Donald Winnicott

Donald Winnicott is another leading Child Psychologist/Psychoanalyst. In fact, it was because of his work as a pediatrician that he became a Psychologist/Psychoanalyst. It led him to observe the critical role of the mother in helping children face the incessant and overbearing demands of Reality.

According to Winnicott, in the beginning, the mother and the infant child are both physically and emotionally so tightly bound together—“fused” as it were—that the experience is that of an indivisible connection. In other words, the child feels that she or he is an integral part of the mother, and vice versa. There is no individuation or separateness as it were.

Over time, and with great sensitivity, one of the most important jobs of the mother is to help the child separate and thus face external Reality. If the mother too quickly and too soon forces the child out of the protected cocoon, what Winnicott called “The Holding Environment,” then the child is not merely overwhelmed, but subject to trauma, thereby harming its future prospects in facing the unremitting demands of life.

With the failure of virtually all of the societal systems on which we depend, it’s no exaggeration to say that a goodly part of the stress we are experiencing is due to the breakdown of the larger “Societal Holding Environment.”

If on the other hand, the mother delays unduly the necessity of separation, then the child is also harmed. He or she is unable to make it completely on their own. In short, one is dependent on others to make crucial life decisions.

This is precisely why Winnicott stressed the role of “The Good Enough Mother.” The primary job of The Good Enough Mother is to help the child be the best he or she can be on their own. To accomplish this, the mother does not have to be perfect, but appropriately attuned to the needs and emotional states of the child. Indeed, demands for perfection actually work against healthy development.

Of course, all of us are naturally dependent on a host of others to function, let alone to exist and develop in the first place. Indeed, society wouldn’t exist without it. The problem arises when we unduly attach ourselves to others who promise to be the “very basis of our being.” When that happens, we are unable to think for ourselves. While we need leaders—indeed, quest after them—who by definition are larger than ourselves, we cannot let them take over completely and control all of our actions and beliefs. But then perpetually navigating the difficult shores of bonding on the one hand and independence on the other is one of life’s crucial tasks. One of the supreme challenges is choosing leaders who will help us be and think for ourselves. While we are incessantly drawn to those who exude charisma, one of the greatest pitfalls is that we’ll be swallowed up by them. Thus, if they fail to achieve what their followers believe that which is their due—for example, becoming the Democratic nominee for President—then they will refuse to vote for another candidate.

One of the most difficult tasks of a leader is helping, if not getting, us to face up to troubling Realities. In this regard, whether we like it or not—and even more whether they like it or not—our leaders are the embodiments of our parents. In effect, they “reparent us” so that we can face more and more difficult realities than our actual parents helped us when we were young. We say more about the crucial role of the parent later and much more about Leadership.

We fear that the Virus will lead many Health Workers to question whether they are “good enough.” If they cannot have direct contact with their children and hold them, then what “good” are they as parents? And since children pick up on the

feelings of their caregivers, we also worry about what the children are feeling. To whom can they talk about their deepest feelings?

More than ever, we desperately need “Good Enough Leaders,” not “perfect ones.”

1.3 Sigmund Freud

From the very beginning, when life takes us under its strict discipline, a resistance stirs within us against the relentlessness and monotony of the laws of thought and against the demands of reality-testing. Reason becomes the enemy.³ [emphasis ours] Sigmund Freud

Without a doubt, one of Freud’s greatest contributions to our understanding of the human condition is his concept of Defense Mechanisms. If he had discovered or formulated nothing else, it would have been more than enough to ensure his lasting fame. To give her the proper credit she is due, Freud’s daughter Anna later elaborated on the mechanisms first identified by her father.

Defense Mechanisms not only basically exist, but work to protect one’s mind from events and Realities that are too painful to acknowledge and thereby face forthrightly. Thus, if one has been in a life-threatening situation; witnessed the harm and, worst of all, the death of a close friend or loved one; and been the subject of a violent attack, then the mind can literally shut down in order to protect one from remembering, and hence reliving, the horrific event. But since they are never perfect, painful events constantly resurface in the form of recurring nightmares, extreme sensitivity to sounds such as the backfires of cars, and disturbing images of catastrophes that remind one of the initial traumatizing events.

As one of the founders of the modern field of Crisis Management, Mitroff and his colleagues have witnessed the operation of Defense Mechanisms in countless organizations. While they were first discovered and thus pertained solely to individuals, they apply equally as well to larger groups and institutions. Indeed, it’s been found that the more that an organization subscribes to them, the less prepared it is and thereby the more susceptible it is to crises. And, the more ideological a group, the more it uses them as well to ward off serious challenges to its basic beliefs.

As individual Defense Mechanisms get reinforced and spread among a group or organization, they become an integral part of a group and an organization’s culture. New employees become socialized to unconscious norms such as “This is how we deny Reality around here.” In this way, shared, collective Defense Mechanisms become an organization’s fundamental way of protecting itself from overwhelming, highly stressful, and fearful events.

First and foremost is Denial. In this case, one staunchly denies that a life-threatening or disturbing series of events ever occurred in the first place, or dismisses those entirely with which one doesn’t know how to deal. Or worse, those with which one doesn’t want to deal. Thus, Climate Change Denial is especially

³Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psych-Analysis, Norton, New York, 1990, p. 42.

high among Trump supporters and Republicans in general. But then so is a host of other things that they are loath to acknowledge. Thus, charges of collusion and corruption by the President are dismissed out of hand. Or, they are the product of Fake News concocted by those who are “out to get the President.” Similarly, the unprecedented numbers of resignations and indictments of those who have served in The Trump Administration are similarly dismissed. So are the charges of his innumerable affairs and constant demeaning of women and minorities, plus of course, payments of hush money to porn stars and others.

In the case of organizations, Denial takes the form of “We don’t have *any* problems around here.”

Disavowal at least acknowledges that unpleasant events and realities have actually occurred or are very likely to result, but it greatly diminishes their importance or impact. Thus, Trump may have indeed done some awful things in the past, but they don’t distract from all the good he’s accomplishing now. Disavowal is thereby one of the most powerful forms of rationalization. In the case of organizations, it assumes the form “All of our problems are minor and will go away on their own.”

Compartmentalization and Intellectualization not only go hand in hand, but complement Denial and Disavowal. In the case of Compartmentalization, things that are intimately connected are kept tightly apart and/or the connection is vigorously denied. Thus, it’s truly impossible to separate Trump’s constant insults and demeaning behavior from his policies as his supporters are wont to do. In a similar way, it’s impossible to separate the character/personality of any candidate from his or her policies. Nonetheless, Compartmentalization does the trick for their followers.

It’s also impossible to separate Trump from the history of the modern Republican Party. Trumpism has been in the making for years. And, it will continue long after him.⁴ For this reason alone, we dissect his behavior.

In the case of organizations, Compartmentalization is the belief that “All of our problems are isolated and therefore can’t bring down the entire System.”

In the case of Intellectualization, one argues that while one may not like Trump’s constant Tweets and rants—his general form of “communication”—and in fact wishes fervently that he wouldn’t do it, once again, his policies overshadow bad behavior that wouldn’t be tolerated for one instant in any other President or major leader.

In the case of organizations, Intellectualization reads, “Excellent organizations don’t have major problems!”

Projection puts the blame for problems squarely on others who “are basically out to get us.” Thus, for Trump and his Republican cronies, all problems are due to the “Radical Socialist Democrats.” Indeed, the Coronavirus is a hoax purposely concocted by Democrats to bring down the President. In short, one projects all of those aspects that one doesn’t like about oneself and is thereby reluctant to acknowledge onto others. Thus, social distancing is the fault of “all those who don’t respect us

⁴Nicholas Lemann, “The After-Party, What will happen to the Republicans post-Trump?,” The New Yorker, November 2, 2020, pp. 54–65.

and our ways of life.” In the case of organizations, “Our competition is out to get us.” To put it mildly, it’s a blatant example of Splitting.

Projection also justifies one’s actions because it attributes one’s own worst impulses to others. Thus, if Democrats were in power, then they too would also be trying to ram through Supreme Court Justices.

Finally, Idealization and Grandiosity are best seen in Trump’s own oft-expressed words that “only he and he alone can solve all of our momentous problems.” Indeed everything about him is “tremendous.” After all, “he’s accomplished things that no one ever has before him.” In short, he suffers from unrestrained Delusions of Grandiosity.

And, “As an excellent organization, we don’t have any problems with which we can’t deal.”

In spite of their persistence and power, Defense Mechanisms cannot ultimately hold Reality at bay. Indeed, the more they hold sway, the greater and the more debilitating the Reality that is needed to break through. The danger is that by then it’s so overwhelming that it’s done irreparable damage. Thus, by the time The Trump Administration publicly acknowledged the seriousness of the Coronavirus, it had already gotten out of hand and caused too much damage that tragically could have been curtailed, even if it couldn’t have been prevented altogether.

In short, by distorting Reality in one way or another, Defense Mechanisms end up preventing people from effectively coping with It. In effect, they are akin to a major addiction. They provide temporary relief from pain and feelings of discomfort, but they cause long-term damage to health and happiness by preventing a person from coping with real problems and severe challenges to life and society.

All of the Defense Mechanisms play a major role with regard to the Coronavirus. Thus, Denial and Disavowal work in tandem to deny that it’s all that dangerous in the first place. And Compartmentalization works to say that “While it may affect others, it won’t affect me.” Therefore, sheltering in place is not needed. Projection works to find fault with “those responsible for the Virus in the first place,” and so on. Major crises are a veritable breeding ground for Defenses. The bigger the crisis, the more that human beings unconsciously need to minimize it so they are not overwhelmed by a Reality with which they cannot cope.

1.4 Eric Berne

Eric Berne developed a highly engaging and eminently accessible account of the Psyche. Building directly on Freud’s Superego, Ego, and ID, Berne recast them as three distinct voices that so-to-speak are in everyone’s head: the Parent, Adult, and Child.

The Parent is the inner voice that says, “Do this and don’t do that.” Thus, Berne’s Parent is authoritarian following Freud’s harsh Superego.

The Child—Freud’s ID—is the unbridled instinctual energy that is in us all that “just wants to have fun with no thought whatsoever for the consequences.”

It thereby falls to the Adult—the Ego—to mitigate, essentially negotiate, and thereby resolve the inner conflicts between the harsh demands and strictures of the Parent and the endless pleasure-seeking, no-thought-of-the-consequences, Child.

If the Parent dominates, then one is perceived as cold and rigid. If on the other hand, the Child has an upper hand, then in effect one has refused to grow up. One remains, in essence, dominated by childish impulses and an insatiable neediness for love and attention and adoration that can never be fulfilled or satisfied.

Still, one is viewed as lifeless if one doesn't have more than a modicum of the Child. And, one always needs the Parent to rein in one's uncontrolled impulses.

One of the things that is most disturbing about Trump is that he is mainly all Parent and Child, indeed, primarily an undeveloped, if not an irreparably Wounded, Child. Lacking a well-developed Adult is what has made him supremely unfit for office. But then this is also what's so frightening about his supporters as well.

Sadly, when it came to the realities of how Senators Sanders and Warren would actually pay for their grandiose healthcare plans they are a mixture of the Parent and Child as well. But herein lies the great contrast and divide between Moderate and Progressive Democrats. Whereas Moderates appeal primarily to the Adult, Progressives appeal to the Parent and Child. More than ever, they need one another to become a fully functioning person. And of course, we wouldn't expect them to necessarily agree with our characterizations.

This illuminates another important aspect of Berne's theory, Cross Communication. This occurs when one treats and thus speaks to an Adult as a Parent does to a Child. That is, where one expects to be treated as an Adult, one is treated as a Child, and vice versa. To say that this leads to misunderstandings and lasting resentments is putting it mildly.

The Coronavirus is a virtual laboratory for Cross Communication. Whereas the Governors and Public Health Officials have done their best to communicate with the general public in the language and style of the Adult, the vast majority of their constituents have accepted their messages and responded in turn. Nonetheless, sizable numbers have responded as Petulant Children citing that it's "their Constitutional Right to defy orders to stay at home." The worst is the behavior of fringe groups that have shown up in State Capitols with assault weapons.⁵

The Governors and Public Health Officials cannot abandon communicating as Adults for it would be to forsake their basic responsibilities. But they have to be aware that in times of extreme crisis, people revert to either the Parent or the Child. Without sounding like an overbearing Parent or treating them as Children, they have to reassure them as a kind and understanding Parent would.

⁵ See Like Mogelson, "Nothing to Lose but Your Masks, A conservative rebellion against lockdown," *The New Yorker*, August 24, 2020, pp. 32–45.

1.5 John Bowlby

John Bowlby was a British Psychologist/Psychoanalyst. He established what is known as Attachment Theory (AT). AT stresses that humans have an innate need to connect, to form deep attachments with one another. In particular, he discovered the different forms and styles of attachment and especially what happens when healthy forms are lacking.

Bowlby began his work during World War II. Since many children were sent out of London for safety and others were orphaned, he studied the toll of what long hours of deprivation from one's basic caregivers did to the emotional lives of young children. When they were first separated or institutionalized and left alone, the children cried uncontrollably for hours. When no one finally came to comfort them, they shut down emotionally and became in effect comatose. In short, they were suffering from Attachment Disorders. When they were eventually reunited with their parents or caregivers, Bowlby was able to discern very different styles of Attachment, in effect Reattachment.

There are two basic styles: Secure and Insecure. Secure parents are comfortable with others because they are basically comfortable with themselves. As a result, they are able to respond appropriately to the distress of others. In sharp contrast, Insecure caregivers are uncomfortable with others because they are basically uncomfortable with themselves.

In many ways, Secure parents or caregivers correspond to Authoritative Parents. They know the "right things to do in the right ways." In contrast, Insecure Parents are either Authoritarian, Laissez-Faire, or Completely Uninvolved. Authoritarians are cold, harsh, and unforgiving. Once again, it's "my way or the highway." Laissez-Faire Parents leave children themselves to set their own rules without appropriate guidance. And, Uninvolved are exactly what the name implies. For all purposes, they are not there physically and emotionally. They don't care at all.

To say that on every level and facet of society—the world in general—that we need Secure Leaders is putting it mildly. Indeed, we need them desperately.

Once again, we worry what the Coronavirus is doing in terms of Attachment. We worry that it's causing Secure health workers to act and to be viewed Insecure in both their eyes and that of their children and spouses.

1.6 Concluding Remarks

While different and highly distinctive, all of the Psychologists whose work we've examined all too briefly build on one another. Each and every one of them stresses the need for understanding and thus coming to grips with the deeper forces that guide human behavior. They certainly emphasize the serious dangers in ignoring them. We do so at our extreme peril.

In Appendix 1, we discuss the work of another eminent Psychiatrist, Dr. Kübler-Ross. Her studies of those facing eminent death shed additional light on the various reactions to the Coronavirus.

Especially now in our nation's history, in order to be "secure" in every sense of the term, we need Secure leaders. Indeed, the Coronavirus brings out the Fearful, Wounded Child in all of us. We all feel abandoned and betrayed by forces that the so-called Adults are unable to control.

Most important of all, they reaffirm the dire need to listen to and follow the dictates of reputable scientific advisors.

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