

HOW HATRED BUILDS THE WALLS OF SOCIETY'S BUNGALOW



Frustration turns into hate.

José Napoleón Duarte

Politics, as a practice, whatever its professions, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds.

Henry Adams

One more ingredient is necessary to make the notion of the enemy click: hatred. The persistence with which societies offer permission to hate is astonishing. Jesus gave permission to frown upon the rich.¹⁵⁸ Medieval Christianity gave permission to hate heathens. Islam gives permission to hate infidels. Marxism gives the have-nots permission to hate the haves. Unions give permission to hate bosses. Peace groups give permission to hate militarists. Conservatives give permission to hate liberals. Each culture chooses an enemy on which to blame a goodly portion of the earth's evil and turns hatred of that group into a virtue. But from what raw substance is this group adhesive distilled?

A vast number of studies by clinical psychologists like N. H. Azrin, R. R. Hutchinson, and D. F. Drake show that frustration generates rage. Train a rat to run down a straight tunnel toward a piece of food. When it reaches the tunnel's end, it gets to eat. Then, place a plexiglass barrier in the rodent's path. When it reaches the transparent obstacle, the rat can still see its food but can no longer reach it. This is frustration. How does the animal respond? By going into a fury. If you place a bottlebrush next

The Lucifer Principle

to the plastic barrier, the enraged rat will tear the object to pieces. Give him a smaller cousin, and he will abuse the diminutive beast terribly.¹⁵⁹ From these observations and a host of human studies we'll go into later in this book, came one of psychology's classic formulations—that frustration and aggression go hand in hand.

But frustration is an experience we cannot dodge. Fashionable as it is to think that none of us can be happy until we fulfill our potential, fulfilling our potential to its limit is an absolute impossibility. If a bacterium were allowed to fulfill its potential, within only four days it could produce more progeny than there are protons in the universe.¹⁶⁰ Fortunately, reality's constraints have kept bacteria from acting out their full reproductive possibilities.

Human males, like microbes, have reproductive capacities that could swamp the solar system. During his lifetime, each man produces enough sperm to inseminate every woman on the planet many times over. (A single ejaculation contains between 100 and 300 million sperm—a supply sufficient to impregnate almost every woman in North America.)¹⁶¹ But the individual's sexual potential is something he can never fulfill. Men everywhere from Sri Lanka to Savannah, Georgia, watch women go by and fantasize possessing them sexually. In his imagination, each male couples with thousands of females by the time he dies. Yet in real life, the average man has mated with only a few.

Even chimpanzees endure this ignominious fate. The dominant chimp in a group hoards all the ladies for himself. Subordinate males are starved for sex. When the head chimp is not looking, the lesser beasts sneak up to friendly looking females and make supplicating, seductive gestures. If the lady seems willing, the furtive Romeo tries to lead her off to some secluded spot where the couple can catch a moment of forbidden love. But, all too frequently, as the pair skulks into the shadows, the lordly top-ranking animal catches a glimpse of their departure and punishes the impertinent commoner brutally for poaching on his harem.¹⁶² The result for humans and chimpanzees alike is a frustration that is inevitable and inescapable. If the psychologists are correct, the upshot should be an ever-growing buildup of aggression. In human groups, how can this hostility be channeled to keep from blowing society apart? It can be aimed safely away from "us" and used to blast away at "them."

There are innumerable causes for frustration in human life. But the

inability to fulfill one's potential is way up there on the list, and that inability is by no means restricted to sex. An ant is born with all the genetic equipment it needs to take on any role in society.¹⁶³ If it is fed one mixture of food by the colony's nurses, it turns into a soldier—a powerful beast far larger than normal size, equipped with savage jaws, and designed to defend the colony against attack. If it is fed another mixture, it becomes a worker, a small but nimble creature capable of carrying loads many times its own weight. And if it is fed a rare potion reserved for the select few, it can blossom into a queen—the one central creature toward whose preservation all efforts are directed, the only ant who gets the privilege of having children.¹⁶⁴

Though an ant may have been hatched as a lowly worker, the blueprints for soldier and queen still lie dormant within her. In fact, if the colony's ruler is killed by marauders or disease, a worker may suddenly blossom with the reproductive powers fate has denied her all her life. She will begin to lay eggs. Leaving her food gathering and housecleaning chores behind, she will exude a substance that instills in passing ants the urge to feed and serve her, for she has ascended to royalty.¹⁶⁵

Humans also on occasion go through transformations that dramatize the possibilities buried within them. During 1860, the citizens of Point Pleasant, Ohio, were distressed by the daily sight of a slightly rundown-looking store clerk in his late thirties. The man had been in the military, resigned under suspicious circumstances, failed at farming, failed at real estate, and ended up working in his father's leather-goods store. He was a poor excuse for a salesman, a worse-than-incompetent bill collector, and didn't even seem to know the establishment's stock. What's more, there were rumors that he had a problem with the bottle. Then, in 1861, the Civil War broke out, and the town failure enlisted in a regiment of volunteers. Less than two years later, he was promoted to major general. Eventually, he became president. His name was Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁶⁶

Like ants, each one of us is built with all the equipment necessary to be a master or a slave, a beggar or a king. Most of us, however, will be only one of these. We will dream of the higher fortunes that could have befallen us, but, for the most part, we will never taste those possibilities in real life. And, as we grow older, many of us will carry an increasing burden of resentment for the fates we failed to have.

In some ways, it is the social organism and its needs that determine

the role each of us will play and the many more roles that each of us will never be given the power to act out.¹⁶⁷ How the demands of the larger social beast determine our fate is hinted at by another aspect of the life of ants. Some of these Hymenoptera are lazy and sit around all day doing very little; others work their tails off in the interest of the community. But try separating the ne'er-do-wells from the industrious and setting them up as two new colonies—one composed exclusively of layabouts and the other made up entirely of nose-to-the-grindstone types. A strange thing happens. In the community of laggards, a large proportion of the lazy little beasts suddenly become imbued with a furious sense of industry. They turn into workers. On the other hand, in the community composed completely of workers, a small portion of the formerly zealous toilers seem overcome with boredom and settle down to spend their days doing nothing. They become the new leisure lovers. Each new colony takes on the shape of the old one.¹⁶⁸

An individual ant behaves very much like a cell in a developing embryo. Any embryonic cell could just as easily become part of a liver, an eyeball, or a toe. What determines which of those things that cell turns into? Its position in the rapidly unfolding body. The embryo is "striving" to develop in a certain form. The individual cell behaves almost as if it were looking at a blueprint, figuring out where it is, and determining what it has to be to make the embryo come out according to plan. In a chick, you can take a cell that was about to develop into a wing feather and move it to the location that's destined to be a foot. If you perform the maneuver in time, the former wing-feather cell will turn into a perfectly normal piece of claw. The process is called cellular differentiation.¹⁶⁹

The same thing happens in the all-worker and all-drone ant colonies. They undergo differentiation. There seems an implicit sketch for the contours of the community. A lone ant, in some peculiar way, looks around and sees where it sits in the social matrix, then becomes what it has to be to make the community fit the master plan.

Human groups go through a similar process. Researcher Richard Savin-Williams spent a season watching summer campers interact. In June, the bunk-mates met for the first time. For roughly an hour, the campers felt each other out, probing each other's strengths and weaknesses, deciding who would be friends with whom. Then they quickly sorted themselves into a superorganism with a head, limbs, and a tail.

One camper became the "alpha male," the dominant individual, the group leader. Another became the "bully," a big, strong brute nobody particularly liked. A third became the "joker," everybody's good-natured sidekick. And one became the "nerd," the unathletic, overly eager sort that everyone else felt free to kick around. Like the ants and the embryonic cells, each boy had taken his place in a kind of preordained social blueprint.

Just how preordained that blueprint was and how much of his potential each boy had to sacrifice to assume his role became clear when another researcher tried an experiment. The scientist assembled a cabin composed entirely of "leaders," boys who had been dominant, "alpha males" in their old groups. Very quickly, the new cluster sorted itself out according to the familiar pattern. One of the leaders took charge. Another became the bully. A third became the group joker. And one of the formerly commanding lads even became the new group's nerd.

When the researchers went through the scientific literature to find other data related to their work, they discovered that studies of Chicago gangs in the 1920s had shown these long-gone groups arranging themselves according to an almost identical unconscious plan. The gang members of a bygone era also had their leaders, bullies, jokers, and nerds. Each individual had taken up a position in the superorganism's unfolding structure. And each had shaped his personality to fit the spot in which he landed.¹⁷⁰

For the ant, the possible roles the insect discards may never come back to haunt her. In humans, however, the personalities that could have been are always there, always uncomfortable in their imprisonment. And periodically they scream from the dungeons of the mind, demanding their freedom.

The novelist Hermann Hesse said that we each have a thousand personalities hidden in a mental closet. The circle of our consciousness centers on one, but the others are in the darkness waiting to come out. Implicit in each of us is the whole society, the dominant individual, the outcast, and all the variations in between. Novelists, more than the rest of us, realize how many possible people inhabit our minds. When these authors sit down to their typewriters, whole casts of characters come parading into the light of awareness, each ready to live out a new life. And each of these fictional humans is disgorged by the brain of just one writer, who

in real life has settled on the single personality and fate he will call his own.

The buried personalities may be erased from the surface of consciousness, but they still wriggle toward the light—in anger, frustration, and jealousy. Every male is built with the same neuronal networks that compelled Genghis Khan to conquer an empire twice the size of Rome's,¹⁷¹ the same set of circuits that motivated some of Genghis's descendants to accumulate hundreds of wives and even more concubines, the same instincts that impelled Turkish sultans to have attractive women from all over their domains shipped in for a few nights of physical glory.¹⁷² But in most cases, those circuits will never unfurl their ambitions in the real world. We have thousands of mental mechanisms crying out vainly for a moment of triumph, thousands of potential personalities that will never be allowed to live.

Frustration, as the researchers have demonstrated, breeds rage. Hatred is a despicable by-product of the human condition. Nature, however, frequently utilizes such garbage as building material. We will see how she has employed the psychological detritus of hatred in a minute, but first, let's take a close look at another example of how the natural world often turns a poisonous excretion to good use. The instance I have in mind keeps each of us from turning to an oozy blob.

Communities of cells living in the seas roughly 600 million years ago had a chemical disposal problem. From the surrounding waters, they took in large quantities of calcium, a substance that could in megadoses poison them. To function effectively, the cells had to constantly filter the calcium out of the water and deposit it outside the cellular backdoor, where the mineral wouldn't interfere with the cell's internal functions.

Somewhere along the line, a cellular community evolved a clever way of getting rid of its unwanted calcium contaminants. The collective compacted its discarded calcium sludge into safe cylinders and laid these solid slivers of deactivated toxic waste along the interior corridors between the huddled cells. The disposal technique produced a surprising benefit. The discarded calcium rods became structural beams that gave added strength and power to the cellular cooperative. They were bones, devices that made revolutionary forms of movement possible, and eventually enabled cellular superorganisms to lift themselves out of the water onto the land.¹⁷³

Howard Bloom

In human society, another kind of garbage, this one psychological, is used for similar structural purposes. The waste product, in this case, is the frustration from which hatred is distilled. The frustration of humans collects much as calcium accumulated in the space between cells of the early ocean-living, cellular communities. To avoid damage within the group much of it is directed somewhere else, at outsiders. Envy and fear are turned from a source of disruption to a creator of cohesion. Nature has compacted mankind's frustrations to build the superorganism's bones.

The demon one society wants to eradicate is all too frequently the god of some rival group.¹⁷⁴ Baal, the god of the Canaanites, was a false idol to the Jews. The former Soviet Union's longtime gods—Marx and Lenin—are our devils. Our revered middle class was the former Soviet Union's hated bourgeoisie. Social organisms—like clusters of anemones on a rock—face off and fight. From that struggle, they frequently derive their identity. Battle draws a set of straggling individuals together into a firmly consolidated social clump. It gives the formerly quarreling separatists a powerful common bond.

Leaders like Orville Faubus and Fidel Castro have skillfully manipulated a few basic rules of human nature: that every tribe regards outsiders as fair game; that every society gives permission to hate; that each culture dresses the demon of its hatred in the garb of righteousness; and that the man who channels this hatred can rouse the superorganism and lead it around by the nose.

MAN—INVENTOR OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD

