# LOVE AS *PHARMAKON*

## Freud, the neighbor, and the political economy of narcissism

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*To an ordinary human being, love means nothing*
*if it does not mean loving some people more than others.*
GEORGE ORWELL, 'Reflections on Gandhi' (1949)

IN ONE OF his Vienna lectures during World War I, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) recounts an anecdote about a Hungarian village where a blacksmith is accused of having committed a crime punishable by death. The problem is that the village has only one blacksmith, therefore rendering the man indispensable to the community. After scrutinizing the case, the village court draws a staggering conclusion: The village is home to several tailors, so the court selects one of them and passes him over to the hangman in the blacksmith's stead.[1]

The tragicomic tale sheds light on an essential mechanism of the politics of libidinal economy: The logic of the scapegoat as an intrinsic part of the seemingly incessant conflicts both between and within political communities of various sorts. Having grown up in a culture steeped in anti-Semitism, Freud later in life also had to endure the emergence of the Hitlerian nightmare, which ultimately forced him into exile in London, and three of his sisters into the gas chambers of Treblinka. Freud's work is full of attempts to untangle the hatred of the Other in general, and of the Jew in particular, as an instance of what he called "displacement" (*Verschiebung*), a technical term that refers to the unconscious operation by which a certain object or phenomenon is supplanted by another. Within the dynamics of collective narcissism, the crucial function of displacement is that of diverting attention from the imperfections and antagonisms within a specific

community by blaming them on a neighboring group within or outside that same community.

The Freudian emphasis on various forms of collective narcissism can help us lay bare the libidinal economy at work not only in the distribution of wealth and resources, rights and benefits, but also in the ways that states and communities design and cultivate contrasts between people worthy of love and people worthy of hatred, between friends and enemies, between the good and the bad neighbor.

In the ancient Greek tradition, the function of the scapegoat is condensed in the notion of the *pharmakon*, a double-edged term signifying both poison and remedy. On the one hand, the scapegoat is invested with the sum of the corruption of the community (thus embodying the poison that haunts the community); on the other hand, the scapegoat is as a result brutally excluded or even annihilated from it (thus constituting the sacrificial remedy through which the community cleanses itself from its sins and evils). "What is the rite of purification?" asks Oedipus in Sophocles' Athenian tragedy. And Creon answers: "By banishing a man, or expiation of blood by blood."[2]

Though he does not explicitly refer to the Greek term *pharmakon*, Freud echoes its twofold logic by stressing that it is "always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love [*Menschen in Liebe an einander zu binden*], provided that others are left out as targets of aggression."[3] In Freud's view, therefore, the morphing of the neighbor into an enemy and scapegoat appears to be inherent in the workings of Eros itself, being at once a *Bindemittel*, a bond that brings people together, and a truly disruptive force, a source of hatred and violence. Love is a powerful drug, at once toxic and healing.

Strangely enough, this dimension of love is strikingly absent in many of the predominant theories of social and political antagonism. You will not find any comprehensive theory about love in the works of John Locke (1632–1704), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Karl Marx (1818–1883), or Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), to name but a few examples. As a rule, the role of Eros in politics is highly marginalized. By contrast, Freud continuously gives prominence to Eros as one of only two "progenitors of human civilization" (the other being Ananke, the

realm of needs and necessities), and he invariably situates it at the heart of both human coexistence and conflict. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (*Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, 1921), Freud even asserts that it is "love relationships" (*Liebesbeziehungen*) that constitute the essence of group formation, be it religious, ethnic, or political.[4]

It is well known that the Austrian psychoanalyst frequently states his ignorance about political matters. Nevertheless, this doesn't prevent him from doggedly attempting to grasp and lay bare some of political philosophy's core questions: What defines civilization and how does it emerge? From what sources do human morality and religion stem? Is it possible to reconcile the desires of the individual and the claims of the masses, the family and the state, human beings with nature? How are liberty, justice, law, and power interrelated? And how are we to evaluate—and possibly even reform—the institutions and ideologies that regulate human relationships?

Stressing the role of Eros in all these regards, Freud challenges some of the basic assumptions of political thought, not least as regards the dynamics of group psychology and the roots of social and political antagonism. Much like Karl Marx (the explorer of political economy and the realm of Ananke), Freud (the investigator of libidinal economy and the realm of Eros) persistently addresses the question as to why the history of mankind has been so marked by violence and gruesome conflicts between states, nations, and neighbors.

## The narcissism of minor differences

Let us begin with Freud's familiar notion of "the narcissism of minor differences" (*Narzißmus der kleinen Differenzen*). He first introduces the concept at the end of World War I and returns to it on several occasions throughout his life. The notion, inspired by the British anthropologist Ernest Crawley (1867–1924), is used by Freud to expound on the hostility between neighboring groups or nations that otherwise share many common traits. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930), Freud explains it as follows:

> It is precisely those communities that occupy contiguous territories and are otherwise closely related to each other—like the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the North Germans and the South Germans, the English and the Scots, etc.—that indulge in feuding and mutual mockery.[5]

To Freud's list of examples, we can surely add many other and even much worse instances, such as the grisly conflicts between the South and the North Koreans, the Indians and the Pakistanis, the Serbs and the Croats, the Hutus and the Tutsis, or the Israelis and the Palestinians. The narcissism of minor differences proves to be ripe for transformation into a narcissism of allegedly major differences, turning mockery and insults into massacres and genocides.

Taking the church, the nation, and the army as instances of collective narcissism, Freud argues that they are formed by the love that their members share for their common leaders—Christ, the head of state, the Commander-in-Chief—and by the same members' "illusion" that they are equally loved by their leaders. The *Bindemittel* which unites the individuals with their leaders—different manifestations of the father figure—also serves as a bond that unites them as "brothers" or "sons" with one another.

Now, for all the love that may circulate among members of such a community, there is nevertheless always a limit that prevents Eros from extending endlessly, thereby safeguarding it from the "inflation" that otherwise would threaten it. The members—those who are already inside the community—are not prone to give up the privileges and benefits that result from being elevated by their beloved leader. This is the reason why Freud underscores that all kinds of libidinally attached groups—be they religious, nationalistic, political, or even scientific—are disposed to "cruelty" and "intolerance" against those who don't belong to the same community.

It is noticeable how the narcissism at work in a given group rests on fearful and obscene fantasies about the invisible and elusive part that dwells behind the bodily surface of the putative Other. The lugubrious history of nationalistic, ethnic, and religious conflicts teaches us

that almost any sign can be used as a mark of partition, as a password, a *shibboleth*, designed to keep all signs of sameness in the Other at bay. Even the smallest difference, in accent, clothing, or eating habits, say, can be exalted to the point that it becomes an insurmountable obstacle to coexistence. "The smaller the real difference is between two peoples," says the historian Michael Ignatieff, "the larger it is bound to loom in their imagination. Enemies need each other to remind themselves of who they are. A Croat, thus, is someone who is not a Serb. A Serb is someone who is not a Croat."[6]

It is by way of the alleged enemy that the presumed friends summon themselves against the dreaded extimate part that dwells within their own imagined intimacy. Nothing is more important than keeping the dividing line intact and thereby preventing ambiguity from entering into the imagined pureness of the cherished community. Far from being reducible to the struggle for material resources and pure survival—the part of civilization that Freud confers to Ananke—Eros offers an altogether different logic in which the conflicts revolve around "sexual" privileges. Certainly, Freud's notion of Eros here extends far beyond the carnal act. It permeates the nitty-gritty of everyday life where humans contend for recognition as sexual beings—as men or women, etc.—and for "the narcissistic satisfaction" that resides in "being able to think that one is better than others."[7]

In the 1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973) made the following astute observation as regards the contradictory economies of Ananke and Eros: "If you can convince the lowest white man that he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice that you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."[8] The logic of Eros complicates the idea of a linear and progressive History that supposedly pushes all men towards a universal community of equals. While the struggle for material resources, at least in theory, could allow for the possibility of a future where basic needs are satisfied and the reasons for political strife, therefore, dissipate (the hypothesis of classical Marxism), the struggle for erotic satisfaction has no end in sight since love is both insatiable and inextricably linked with the claim to exclusivity. Hence Freud's assertion

that "the Communists" are naïve in their belief that the abolition of private property would put an end to social and political antagonism. Although Freud concedes that a more just distribution of wealth and property would rob aggression of one of its tools, he nevertheless stresses that the prevailing polarizing features of Eros will prevail:

> Even if we do away with the personal right to own material goods, the prerogative that resides in sexual relations still remains [*das Vorrecht aus sexuellen Beziehungen*], and this is bound to become the source of the greatest animosity and the fiercest enmity among human beings who are equal in all other aspects.[9]

At times of political unrest and increasing polarization, the marks of libidinal partition tend to engulf everyday life and impose its pressing Manichaeism on everyone: Are you with or against us? Are you loyal or disloyal, a true believer or an infidel—worthy of love or worthy of hatred? The dissipation of gray areas, of in-betweens, of any middle ground, creates a state where everything you do or say will be interpreted as signs of either loyalty or betrayal. Matters get even worse when brute force comes into the picture. From this moment on, not even the most atrocious deed is out of the question, as long as it is framed as a defensive act stemming from love and loyalty.

The remarks of George Orwell in 'Notes on nationalism' chimes well with the Freudian analysis:

> There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when 'our' side commits it. Even if one does not deny that the crime has happened, even if one knows that it is exactly the same crime as one has condemned in some other case, even if one admits in an intellectual sense that it is unjustified—still one cannot *feel* that it is wrong. Loyalty is involved, and so pity ceases to function.[10]

And yet, there are always ambiguities involved in the inquisitorial procedures that are launched to distinguish between neighboring groups, thereby disrupting the frail alliance between power, knowl-

edge, and pleasure. No single *shibboleth* can by itself sustain the limit between self and other, friend and enemy, good and bad neighbor. No *shibboleth* can fully control Eros—"invincible in battle," as Sophocles (*c.* 497/496–406/405 BC) portrays the power of love in *Antigone*[11]—from transgressing borders and turning enemies into friends, or friends into enemies. In other words, the strategy intended to expel ambivalence tends to gradually morph into its opposite and give rise to confusion. We are dealing here with the uncanny dialectics of Self and Other inherent in the narcissism of minor differences. If the allegedly inferior neighboring group, that we define ourselves against, turns out to be different from what we believe that they are, then it must follow that we are not what we believe that we are.

Erich Koch (1896–1986), appointed by Hitler to rule Ukraine between 1941 and 1944, made this point clear when he came to suspect that the Ukrainian *Doppelgänger* might not be as inferior as the Germans claimed: "If I find a Ukrainian who is worthy to sit with me at the table, I must have him shot."[12] This fear of the Other as Self, or of the Self as Other—the fear of the flux between the inside and outside—explains why *shibboleths* consistently change and why new procedures are perpetually invented in an attempt to stabilize the Other *as* Other. In this sense, the boundaries of the collective subject both mirror and exacerbate the lack of stability that already pervades the individual ego. Human identity is shaped by a labyrinth of more or less disjointed and incompatible identifications and impulses, dreams of belonging, and yearnings for exclusivity in matters of love. As a consequence, both the ego and the group are subject to disturbances and vicissitudes, making the boundaries of our identities more elusive, ambiguous, and unsheltered than we wish them to be. At the end of the day, we always run the risk of being exposed as being nothing more than haphazard members of fortuitous communities.[13]

## The ego is not master in its own house

Once our attention has been drawn to the uncanny workings of Eros within both individual and collective narcissism, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Freud's thoughts on group formation and human

subjectivity clash with longstanding assumptions within political philosophy. Freudian psychoanalysis breaks with the enduring (Platonic) tradition that gives ontological primacy to reason over emotions, it rebuffs the idea that God (or History) will one day reconcile the contradictions that torment human civilization, and it dismisses the hope of a future where alienation is at last dispelled.

There is nothing in Freud's concept of man that endorses the utopian longings of the leftist revolutionary tradition, as expressed, for instance, in the following lines by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) which explicitly involve the neighbor:

> A man's existence must be entirely visible to his neighbor, whose own existence must in turn be entirely visible to him, in order for true social harmony to be established. This cannot be realized today, but I think that it will be once there has been a change in the economic, cultural, and affective relations among men, beginning with the eradication of material scarcity [*raréte matérielle*].[14]

Entirely visible to your neighbor? True social harmony? A society in which—as Sartre asserts—"each person will give himself completely to someone else, who will also give himself completely"?

According to Freud, man is by essence—that is, not by coincidence, by original sin, or as a result of class divisions or material scarcity—unfathomable both to his neighbors and to himself. Neither Messiah nor the Revolution can save us from the impenetrability of our desires, from the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) that pervades the most intimate parts of our existence. The unconscious (*das Unbewußte*) relentlessly undermines the subject's claim to sovereignty: "The ego" (*das Ich*), Freud declares, is "not master in its own house" (*nicht Herr im eigenen Haus*).[15]

There is yet another precept that inspires Freud's resistance, even blatant hostility. Time after time, Freud assails the biblical commandment of love towards all men: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Du sollst den Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst*).[16] A closer look at his argument can help us understand some of the underpinnings

of Freud's conceptions of love and communal antagonism. To begin with, Freud makes the crucial point that love is a finite resource. Attempting to love all people indiscriminately would not only erode the value of your love; it would also be unjust to the people—be it friends or family members—who prize your love as a sign of preference for them.[17] No person can claim to love everyone equally unless, perhaps, they simultaneously affirm that everybody is equally entitled to nothing more than "a modicum of love" (*ein geringer Betrag Liebe*).[18] The universalizing injunction to neighborly love thus collides with the logic of collective narcissism, which imposes particular duties on its members and exhorts them to love only objects that consolidate the cohesion of the group.[19]

Freud's second point is that there are people who are not "worthy of love" (*liebenswert*).[20] The neighbor (*der Nächste*) can be anything from a "model," a "helper," or a "sexual partner"—hence making him or her worthy of recognition and love—but he or she might also prove to be a "stranger" (*Fremde*), an "antagonist" (*Gegner*), or even an "enemy" (*Feind*).[21] Freud rejects the Christian idea that we can, and ought to, love our enemies. Such love would be detrimental to us, he suggests, since it radically undercuts our ability to protect ourselves against those who wish to destroy us. My enemies, Freud asserts, have far "more claim to my hostility and even my hatred" (*mehr Anspruch auf meine Feindseligkeit, sogar auf meinen Haß*) than to my love.[22]

A reader of Freud might perhaps find it awkward, even demoralizing, that the great psychoanalyst not only describes the impediments to Christian universalism, but also engages in ferocious diatribes against it. Freud seems to turn the command on its head by urging us to always be on our guard against each other. Do not love thy neighbor, unless it is evident that the neighbor in question already loves you.

To better understand Freud's indignation, we must frame his criticism within the larger critical armature of psychoanalysis, distrustful as it is to all kinds of moral precepts that demand more of man than he can offer. Freud rejects every moral assumption that rests on the idea that humans are by nature rational, gentle, and loving creatures. In

the wake of the horrors of World War I, Freud bitterly concludes that man already from birth is endowed with a "powerful share of aggression," originating from the autonomous and indestructible part of us that Freud identifies as the "death drive" (*Todestrieb*). *Homo homini lupus est*.[23]

This new concept, the death drive, marks a new chapter in Freud's understanding of civilization—the term in the German original is *Kultur*—as such. Civilization is nothing less than the manifestation of man's struggle to subdue and render docile the destructive parts dwelling within himself. In Freud's critical hermeneutics, the grand ideals and commandments of civilization testify, by detour, to the horrific drives dwelling in man. What no man desires (*begehrt*), Freud maintains, needs no prohibition:

> The very emphasis of the commandment: Thou shalt not kill, makes it certain that we are descended from an endlessly long chain of generations of murderers, whose love of murder was in their blood as it is perhaps also in ours.[24]

We might try to deny or even suppress the wolf within us; the clash between civilization and human aggression will nonetheless prove to be merciless since civilization's only chance lies in its capacity to turn man's aggression inwards, introjecting it, and recasting it in the shape of the *superego*. This is the dire predicament that Freud attempts to unravel after World War I. The *Unbehagen in der Kultur*—frustration, unease, self-punishment, and the formation of neuroses—is the price for civilization's progress. The self-imposed renunciation of the drives pits man against himself in an endless struggle without a happy ending in sight. "How potent an obstacle to civilization aggression must be," Freud exclaims, "if the defence against it can cause as much unhappiness as the aggression itself!"[25]

And yet, Freud adds, no civilization can ever obliterate the drive to destruction (*der Destruktionstrieb*). It lurks even in the most seemingly peaceful civilization, perpetually looking for new outlets that can help it achieve satisfaction. And this, again, is where displacement

enters the stage. Freud argues that the drive tirelessly seeks to bypass the prohibitions that confront it in order to acquire pleasure through "substitutive objects and actions."[26]

Even the Christians and the communists—their exhortation to universal brotherhood notwithstanding—have proven skillful in assaulting their rivals with utmost savagery. It is, Freud reiterates, only possible to bind people together in so far as others are made out to be possible targets of aggression. The scapegoat serves this purpose exceedingly well. The previously fettered destructive forces are now—when channeled towards somebody outside the community—endorsed and associated with satisfaction rather than guilt. There is pleasure in the very act of inflicting pain on a chosen enemy. From that point on, all kinds of cruelty and barbarity are elevated to landmarks of loyalty, heroism, and moral self-purification.

According to Freud's genealogy of morals, notions of good and bad ultimately derive from "social anxiety"—that is, the "fear of loss of love" from the people that you love, identify with, and depend on.[27]

## Love as *pharmakon*

What, then, can we make of this gloomy outlook on neighborly love? Must we dismiss the dream of universal brotherhood (or sisterhood), and give up all hopes for a New Man and a New World, where nobody will be excluded and left behind? As a matter of fact, Freud himself seems rather discontent with the predicament his criticisms leave us in. Many of his later works display a search for viable principles that could counter his otherwise so somber conclusions. Freud's obsession with the Judeo-Christian commandment seems to spring from an ongoing struggle between two opposing tendencies within his thought.

On the one hand, Freud seems to hold the view that there are two independent and rivaling forces that structure human life: Eros and the death drive. According to this view, human beings are torn between the life-bringing forces of love (the principle that brings people together) and the destructive forces that set them apart. In some of his most dualistic, and strikingly Empedoclean, formulations, Freud seems to echo, albeit in a secularized version, the Christian teachings

about God and the Devil, Good and Evil. At the end of the otherwise so dismal and cheerless *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud yields to a surprising idealism when he states that the hope of mankind resides in the "heavenly" workings of "the immortal Eros," the only force capable of foiling the devious undertakings of the death drive.[28]

The ambiguity of Freud's thought is out in the open: While explicitly dismissing the biblical injunction, he simultaneously lets it slip through the backdoor. It is, after all, on Eros that man must bet in order to counter the destructive forces of the death drive. In a letter to Albert Einstein (1879–1955) in 1932, Freud concludes that Eros might be our best chance to curb our strong inclination to destruction and war:

> If the propensity for war stems from the tendency to destruction, we are prompted to invoke Eros, its counteragent. All that produces ties of sentiment [*Gefühlsbindungen*] between man and man can serve us as a counterweight to war.[29]

Freud even states that Eros, by its very essence, seeks to "gather together individuals, then families and finally tribes, peoples and nations in one great unit—humanity."[30] In this definition, love is an inherent force of life, a life drive at work within man himself, continuously engaged in a fierce power struggle with the death drive.[31]

Immersed in the tragic tradition of Sophocles and Shakespeare (1564–1616), Freud, on the other hand, frequently points out that there is something, if not directly rotten, then at least profoundly troublesome already within the state called Eros. The view that love is the pure negation of hatred, and that it constitutes an antidote to the tendency to destruction, stands in staggering contrast with Freud's claim that love in and of itself constitutes a *pharmakon*, a remedy that is also a poison.

It is worth remembering that the antagonistic dimensions of love take center stage in the most paradigmatic of Freudian concepts: The Oedipus complex. Ambivalence, jealousy, and hatred are ever-present in Freud's early theories of human sexuality. Even the infant is con-

sumed by these powerful emotions, marked by an insatiable avidity for the mother, immoderate demands and claims to exclusive love, and a considerable measure of hostility against any authority that deprives him of his satisfactions. The child, says Freud, regards anyone—be it the father or a sibling—who interferes with the attachment to the mother as an intruder, a rival, a traumatic Thing. The infant tolerates no sharing whatsoever. When love is a relationship between two persons, the third party tends to be conceived either as superfluous or as utterly disturbing. Moreover, this demand for love also tends to stir up aggression toward the beloved object itself: "the more passionately a child loves the object, the more sensitive does it become to disappointments and frustrations from that object."[32]

Eros is here, all by itself, sufficient to elucidate the conflicts that arise regarding the beloved object. Already in 1905, Freud affirms that there is an "intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual drive [*Sexualtrieb*]."[33] In his view, love relations must always be understood against the backdrop of the extreme vulnerability and helplessness of the human infant at the (m)other's breast, especially since this introductory experience of love fates us to an endless quest to relive and reiterate this indelible model for all happiness. As the prototype of every subsequent relation of love, "the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it."[34]

The fragile condition of the human child—dependent on the mother both by necessity (Ananke) and sensual love (Eros)—tends to perpetuate itself across the ages, rendering even adult persons acutely sensitive and envious whenever they love someone, as it exposes them to the risk of being rejected or even spurned by the chosen love-object. "We never have so little protection against suffering as when we are in love; we are never so desolate as when we have lost the object of our love or its love for us."[35]

Even the most flagrant forms of enmity are prone to emerge within the dynamics proper to love itself. In this regard, man is no different from the God in whose image he or she is supposedly created—always ready to unleash wrath upon every potential rival to his claim to exclusivity and his prerogatives in the realm of Eros ("*You shall have no*

*other gods before me*"), including the beloved creatures themselves the moment they prove to be unfaithful. "The prevention of erotic satisfaction," writes Freud, "provokes aggression towards whoever interferes with it."[36] In keeping with this framework, love neither appears as the counteragent nor as the opposite of hate. On the contrary, everything in Freud's theory before the introduction of the death drive in 1920 points to a bipolarity in the nature of Eros. Even the most aggressive and transgressive of all (mythical) acts—the slaying of the *Urvater*, as it is outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (*Totem und Tabu*, 1912–1913)—appears to spring out of the inherent bipolarity of Eros itself.[37] Far from binding us universally together, as Freud would have it in his most idealistic moments, love, then, tends to generate bitter antagonism and has the potential to provoke carnage among former brothers and allies as it conjures up mistrust and aversion against anything that comes in its way.

Shrewd politicians have always known how to capitalize on this, constructing their politics around the lack of satisfaction among the population (the *poison*), while at the same time offering a *remedy* for it by blaming it all on a carefully selected scapegoat, the bad neighbor responsible for depriving us of enjoyment. The Other who is not *liebenswert*.

Political discourses generally pretend to offer a better ordering of their community's libidinal economy, regulating its troublesome passions by steering them in one direction or another. There is inevitably something unsettling in the way we love and desire. People cherish objects they are not supposed to cherish, they make love with the wrong people in the wrong way, they find pleasure (*jouissance*) in objects and actions that disrupt the purported moral foundations of the community.[38] The core problem is, of course, that Eros is at once necessary for the reproduction of human life (the remedy), and a constant menace to civilization as such (the poison). As a consequence, civilization must impose "substantial restrictions" on Eros to prevent it from transgressing moral taboos and social hierarchies. Uninhibited sexual impulsions are, to say the least, unfavorable to the formation of long-lasting communities. Freud would probably concur with

Mexican writer Octavio Paz (1914–1998), who wrote that sexuality is "a volcano and any one of its eruptions can bury society under a violent flow of blood and semen."[39] It is both creation and destruction, both life and death.

We don't need to point to some of the more conspicuous instances—the Jim Crow Laws of post-Reconstruction United States, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the Italian Race Laws of 1938, or the South African Immorality Act of 1948—to highlight the extent to which societies tend to detail the regulation of Eros.[40] In a more pedestrian way, it is present already in the more or less severe restrictions meant to uphold the binary and hierarchical sexual difference between men and women, and in the enforcement of the overarching matrix of heterosexual, reproductive, non-incestuous, and monogamous relationships.

"Civilization," Freud comments, "behaves towards sexuality like a tribe or a section that has subjected another and started exploiting it."[41] Always fearful, thus, of the very thing it is founded upon. The politics of libidinal economy is, for this reason, always informed by the struggle around how exactly to fixate the emotions, desires, and passions of the people—given that there are, as Freud asserts, no biologically given links between Eros and its objects. What, and who, are we enjoined to love—and hate? Who among the dead are we admonished to mourn—and who are we bidden to discard and forget? With whom are we called on to identify—and by way of which *shibboleths*?[42]

## For the love of our people

In one way or another, the politics of libidinal economy invents and exploits the narcissism of minor and major differences present in any society. It revolves around making the nation great *again*, or greater than it once was, or at least defending it from the humiliation that undesirable neighbors from within—or outside the borders—are willing to inflict on it. Love thy nation as thyself—by protecting it from the dangers lurking outside and inside its borders. "I am fighting for you," Donald Trump (b. 1946) declares in his speeches to the nation, primarily addressing a rather restricted part of the population as better

and more worthy of love than the others. Hence one of Trump's core promises: To protect and love the true Americans by *putting them first*.

Everything seems warranted in the name of defending and distinguishing the beloved from their presumed aggressors. If the enemy is at the gate, we must stop them before they are at our throats. This is the message delivered in all kinds of Just War rhetoric. Steeped in the language of Eros, the argument transforms the right to self-defense into the justification of all-out invasions and the slaughtering of innocent people. In the early days of October 1943, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), head of the SS, gave a series of speeches to high-ranking SS-officials and district leaders in Posen (a region of Poland) regarding the ongoing "extermination of the Jewish people" (*Ausrottung des jüdischen Volkes*). Himmler repeatedly insisted on the "moral right" and "the duty" of the German soldier to eliminate "this people who wanted to kill us," including women and children. Indeed, it was a "page of glory in our history," he stressed, to have taken on this difficult task "out of love to our people" (*haben diese schwerste Aufgabe in Liebe zu unserem Volk getan*) and without suffering any damage to "our soul" and "our character."[43]

The Russian assault on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 might be another case in point. President Putin's heated discourses intertwine love (of Russia and its people) and hatred (of the West and its fifth columnists). His passionate defense of the threatened motherland—"Kiev is the mother of Russian cities," "Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other"—goes hand in hand with his incitement to wipe out both the so-called "Neo-Nazis" in Ukraine and "the scum and traitors" inside Russia. It is a matter of "purification."[44] By any means necessary.

Love and hatred, life and death, biopolitics and necropolitics, join hands once the liquidation of the neighboring enemy is promoted into something *vitally* important. On the one hand, destruction, subjugation, and annihilation; on the other, creation, construction, and revitalization. As one massacre gives rise to another, the oath of love to one's group as well as to its fallen heroes and martyrs is sworn using the fresh blood of the enemies. Freud's remark in his letter to

Einstein—that the living "organism preserves its own life, so to say, by destroying an extraneous one" (*das Lebewesen bewahrt sozusagen sein eigenes Leben dadurch, daß es fremdes zerstört*)—takes on an ominous meaning in a world where, as he notes already in 1930, human beings are capable of eradicating one another, down to the last man.[45]

Freud may fall short when it comes to dissecting other facets of human antagonism—class warfare, nationalism, material scarcity, the will to power, etc.—but as regards the double-edged forces of Eros, the invincible, his admonitions are uncannily lucid. Being at once a poison and a remedy, a *pharmakon*, it is difficult to foretell if love will save the human race from extermination, or lead us straight to our demise.

## NOTES

**1** Freud 1963, pp. 174–175.
**2** Sophocles 1967, pp. 95–100. See further Girard 2004.
**3** Freud 2002, p. 50; 2006f, p. 402.
**4** Freud 2006d, pp. 430, 444. Cf. Freud 2002, p. 37.
**5** Freud 2002, pp. 50–51; 2006f, p. 402. Freud first used the term in a lecture, 'Das Tabu der Virginität,' addressed to the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society on December 12, 1917.
**6** Ignatieff 1994, p. 14. In his reading of Paul Celan (1920–1970), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) offers a compelling account of the ways in which different forms of *shibboleths*—comprising even the most insignificant and arbitrary marks—can become discriminative, decisive, and divisive (Derrida 1986).
**7** Freud 2002, pp. 79–80. In Freud's view, love seems to comprise all kinds of strong emotional attachments. In his 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (2006d), Freud offers a condensed definition of love, taking as his point of departure the love that has sexual union as its primary aim, and then expanding it further into the domains of self-love, love for parents, children or friends, love for leaders, love for material objects, and even love for abstract entities such as the nation, God, or the human race. The difference between the various expressions of love hinges on the amount of inhibition that is set to mitigate and control raw and immediate sexual drives. It is important to note that Freud never claims to invent an entirely new concept of love. Instead, he asserts that he uses the notion both in accordance with Plato's concept of Eros and with the ways that it is used in everyday language (see ch. 4).
**8** Quoted in Blow 2019.
**9** Freud 2002, p. 50.
**10** Orwell 1984a, p. 316.
**11** Sophocles 1994, l. 781.
**12** Quoted in Snyder 2016, p. 18.
**13** Freud 2006e, pp. 369–389. Cf. Freud 2001, pp. 34–35.
**14** Sartre & Contat 1975.
**15** Freud 1955, pp. 143–144.
**16** Freud 2002, p. 46; 2006f, p. 398.
**17** On this, see Eric L. Santner's article in this volume.
**18** Freud 2006f, p. 399.

**19** The injunction also clashes with a whole series of assumptions that Freud ties to the inborn narcissism of the child, especially the idea that, as a rule, a human being tends to elect his love objects in agreement with the traits that he or she wishes to find in himself or herself. According to this view, the love-object is therefore ordinarily a reflection of the *ideal image* a person holds of themselves—an image which grows out of the identifications that take shape already in the infant with regard to its parents (especially informed by the Oedipus complex). And although the image takes on new facets when the child becomes included in larger social settings than the family—involving new and sometimes contradictory identifications—it almost seems impossible, from this Freudian perspective, for someone to love an absolute stranger. A person, he writes, deserves my love insofar that he or she "resembles" me to that point that I can love myself in him or her. Freud's supposition marries well with the basic conception of the narcissism of minor differences, but it tends to conflict with another essential injunction in Freud's analysis: The principle of exogamy that results from the killing of the prim(ordi)al father. It pertains to the workings of Eros which tend, if not subdued, to transgress all kinds of imposed restrictions and borders. Freud discusses this topic on various occasions, commencing with his introduction of narcissism in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (*Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*, 1914). It is also worth noticing that Freud's reading of the injunction to neighbor-love consistently emphasizes its universal aspirations. Interestingly enough, he never appears to problematize its emphasis on the latter part of the commandment, i.e., that you shall love thy neighbor as you (love) *yourself*. Such a reading would probably bring to the fore other kinds of objections, beginning with the most obvious one: What if a person doesn't love themself? Or if he or she only can, every so often, muster some kind of self-love against the backdrop of an otherwise enduring self-contempt, let alone (sexual or non-sexual) self-hatred? Cf. Zupančič 2000, ch. 8.

**20** Freud 2006f, p. 394.

**21** Freud 2006d, p. 427; cf. 2002, pp. 36, 47. In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (*Entwurf einer Psychologie*, 1895), Freud also uses the German word "Nebenmensch" (which could be translated as the "next man," a "fellow human-being," an "adjoining-person," or a "neighbor"). Cf. Reinhard 2013, pp. 29–34. Here, Freud connects the Nebenmensch with "*das Ding*," a term that Jacques Lacan will later emphasize in his lecture on the ethics of psychoanalysis and the question of neighbor-love (*l'amour du prochain*). "The *Ding*," Lacan says, "is the element that is initially isolated by the subject in his experience of the *Nebenmensch* as being by its very nature alien." Lacan 1992, p. 52.

**22** Freud 2006f, p. 399.

**23** Freud introduces the notion of the death drive in his 1920 *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (2006c). The term *"Todestrieb"* appears for the first time in chapter 6, Freud 2006c, p. 211.

**24** Freud 1957, p. 296. Cf. Freud 2006b, p. 257.

**25** Freud 2002, p. 79. In the German original the quote reads as follows: "Wie gewaltig muß das Kulturhindernis der Aggression sein, wenn die Abwehr derselben ebenso unglücklich machen kann wie die Aggression selbst!", 2006f, p. 422. In her reading of Nietzsche, Freud and Derrida on the topic of cruelty, Judith Butler (b. 1956) offers a succinct account of the same deadlock: "The prohibition of aggressive action is an aggressive attack on aggression which paradoxically preserves, or redoubles, aggression even as it seeks

its eradication." As regards the confrontation between civilization and the death drive, Butler underscores that we can never in advance foretell "the destructive consequences of acts that seek to destroy destruction." See Butler 2014.

**26** Freud 2006b, p. 226.

**27** Freud 1957, p. 280; 2002, p. 61.

**28** Freud 2002, pp. 81–82.

**29** Freud 2006g, p. 491.

**30** Freud 2002, p. 58.

**31** Freud 2002, pp. 58, 81–82.

**32** Freud 1964, p. 124.

**33** Freud 2006a, p. 256.

**34** Freud 2006a, p. 303: "*Nicht ohne guten Grund ist das Saugen des Kindes an der Brust der Mutter vorbildlich für jede Liebesbeziehung geworden. Die Objektfindung ist eigentlich eine Wiederfindung*." It is a matter of dispute whether Freud succeeds in reconciling this assertion with his recurrent thesis that "sexual love" (*die geschlechtliche Liebe*)—and as he sometimes mysteriously adds, between a man and a woman—constitutes the pattern for love in general and for our life-long "quest for happiness" (2002, pp. 19–20). Do love and sexual desire really stem from the same source? To what *Wiederfindung* are the drives to pleasure ultimately leading us—to the reiteration of the lost unity with the mother or to the replication of the intense sensuous satisfaction stemming from (heterosexual) sexual experiences; or, even, to death itself (as regards the death drive?). See Note 7 above, and Fink 2016, chs 1 & 2.

**35** Freud 2002, p. 20.

**36** Freud 2002, p. 75. See further Haddad 2016.

**37** Freud 2006b, ch. 4. The inextricable interconnection between love and hate prompts Lacan in the 1970s to condense the two into a single term: *hainamouration*. See Lacan 1975.

**38** This is a key tenet of Lacanian social theory: Racism is intrinsically linked to the troublesome ways in which the other, the neighbor, appears to organize his or her pleasure or enjoyment (*jouissance*). What is it that the other(s) have that I—or we—don't have? What kind of pleasures are they extracting from their beliefs, traditions, and practices? Never knowing for sure what is going on within the minds of the bordering other(s), the racist becomes obsessed by his or her imaginations of their *jouissance*, bedeviled by the mirage that the other somehow has exclusive access to some mysterious, unhampered, perverse, and undeserved *jouissance.* These fantasies engender what Žižek calls "political jealousy" (2016, p. 75), a mix of envy, resentment, and hatred (or—in Lacan's wording—"*Lebensneid*"; Lacan 1992, p. 237). In the discourse of racism, the Other thus constitutes a challenge to our *way of life* in far more ways than what is expressed in the common accusations that they "steal our jobs and women" (or even territories). It is equally problematic that they devalue the way in which we organize our desires and enjoy our lives, by being disinterested in the gods, the objects, and the traditions that we love and cherish. The chief problem with the other is, ultimately, that they remind us of the traumatizing fact that our striving for satisfaction, and the value of our *jouissance*, are at the mercy of someone outside our control—the "imaginary other." "The subject's experience of satisfaction," Lacan writes, "is entirely dependent on the other [. . .], *the Nebenmensch*" (Lacan 1992, pp. 39, 234). In Lacanian psychoanalysis this phenomenon is often labeled "the theft of Enjoyment." Cf. George & Hook 2021, ch. 2.

**39** Paz 1993, p. 16.

**40** All these laws have in common the strict regulation of sexual relations between races, established in order to protect a particular race against other races. The second Nuremberg Law—'The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor'

(*Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre*)—is a case in point. It bans marriage between Jews and non-Jewish Germans and criminalizes all sorts of sexual relations between them. The Nuremberg Laws, inspired by the American Jim Crow Laws, soon came to be extended to Black people and Roma living in Germany.

**41** Freud 2002, p. 39.
**42** Cf. Butler 2003.
**43** Quoted in Hochstadt 2022, pp. 202–203. Cf. Longerich 2012, pp. 689–690.
**44** Cf. Pomerantsev 2022; Stallard 2022.
**45** Freud 2002, p. 81; 2006g, p. 499.

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