

enemies. It is to this kind of group process, and its ramifications and implications, that we turn in the next chapter.

### Notes

- 1 A coulee is a drainage ditch or culvert through which water passes.
- 2 Without irony, the *Bismarck Tribune* stated that the protesters were "deadly serious" during the protest. See "Tolna Coulee Project" by Lauren Donovan in the *Bismarck Tribune*, 17 May 2011.
- 3 See Luke Harding. "It had a big impact on me'—story behind Trump's whirlwind missile response", *Guardian* (online), 7 April 2017. [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/07/how-pictures-of-syrian-dead-babies-made-trump-do-unthinkable](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/07/how-pictures-of-syrian-dead-babies-made-trump-do-unthinkable).

## Paranoia

All of us can be paranoid.

In the "heat of the moment" we may abandon the complexity of a situation and opt for a simplistic version of reality. This can offer us a more self-friendly version of things; it sometimes feels pleasurable to edge out the riff-raff of multiple meanings, like unwanted immigrants in the mind. And as we can all have feelings or thoughts crossing our minds that are dubious, or wrong, or just plain bonkers, we are accustomed to offloading certain ideas by projecting them into other people, rather than taking our time to calm down and subject such thoughts to reflection and self-correction.

Generally, however, when we solve a problem through paranoid projection we are aware of this, and if we have verbalized our thoughts we may go beyond a correction and apologize for our "over-statement" because we know that more was put into words than should have been. This is a formal recognition of projective processes.

However, if we are part of a group that is inclined to project its "shit" into others, then matters become more complicated and not so simple to reverse. The group projection easily escapes reflective processes. So when Bush and Blair declared that Saddam Hussein was hiding away weapons of mass destruction, they were speaking for a part of the UK-US administrations that had managed to get themselves to believe this. There were plenty of leaders, from all political parties and in many countries, urging them to slow down. But Blair and Bush continued relentlessly onwards,

not because Saddam Hussein posed any serious threat, but because they had worked themselves and their colleagues into such a lather of fury that the urge to annihilate him overcame their better judgement. Their attack on Baghdad, famously described as “shock and awe”, showed very clearly who really had the weapons of mass destruction.

Did Blair and Bush realize this? It is highly unlikely. These otherwise quite decent men were caught up in a power-driven frame of mind that emptied them of self-regulatory responsibility, and they gave in to the pleasures of paranoia: dumping their bad stuff into the other was just impossible to resist.

The leaders of the United States are constantly proclaiming its superior military capacities, as the most powerful country on the earth. Might makes right. Assuming themselves to be “the good guys”, Americans seem quite unaware that this is the stance of a menacing bully, threatening the rest of the world with massive military intervention unless they kow-tow. It seems hard to believe that so many people in positions of responsibility – elected representatives, members of the foreign services, military leaders who knew the costs of war – did not stop to ponder whether they might be setting up Hussein as a toilet for the projection of American shit.

Perhaps the anaesthetics of self-idealization were enough to dull that insight. A violent innocence accompanies the sanctimoniousness of a nation that proclaims itself the standard bearer of human rights, spreading democracy around the world, and this works to cleanse the nation of any guilt that might accrue from its high-handed, at times horrific, treatment of millions of people around the globe.

Projective identification – depositing a part of oneself into another person or a thing – can be subtle, and it sometimes requires some translation.

Trump exclaims that he will “build a great big wall” to keep out the Mexicans. At a time when Americans are fearful of invaders – ISIS, immigrants from Syria and anyone trying to lure American jobs overseas – scapegoating simplifies a highly complex set of fears. “Mexicans” can therefore be translated as “any unwanted person”. Trump ostensibly

(and improbably) intends to create a physical object to keep out the unwanted. As discussed, perhaps the wall stands for Trump’s refusal to entertain complex issues.

Ironically, for a man who has closed his mental borders to the migration of ideas that any president must entertain in order to lead a nation in a thoughtful way, Trump is curiously open about the contents of his own mind.

He rarely attempts to conceal his personality from the media – his mental processes are much more visible than those of his more sophisticated colleagues, such as Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama. This may be in part because he is so accustomed to dealing with the unwanted through projective identification. That is, when he discloses something about himself he quickly shoves it into another.

When he pledges to “Make America Great Again”, we could translate this as “Make *myself* great again”. When he describes Mexicans as “rapists and criminals” this might translate as “I will get rid of my sexist attacks on women and my shady business dealings by putting them into Mexicans.” He accuses the press of issuing “fake news”, whilst he fabricates the “truths” he wishes to espouse; projecting this part of himself into journalists. And so it goes: “Crooked Hillary”, who will not disclose her shady email dealings, stands for Trump who will not disclose his taxes; the chant of “lock her up” is an unconscious reference to the members of his team who may face jail for violating the law.

Who knows what this man really thinks, or who he really is? In some ways, it does not matter. His “persona” – the figure whom he casts into our view and by which he must be judged – is engaged in an endless stream of projective identifications. Whenever he attacks any person or any group, the electorate should ask, “What part of his persona is he projecting and why?”

This type of paranoid functioning is typical of the psychology of the demagogue. For the Greeks, the term “demagogue” referred to a mob leader. These days it has come to mean a leader whose representations of issues is highly selective, and who appeals to the masses because he offers simple solutions to complex matters, gauging the feelings of the society and organizing them into a political rhetoric.

This captures paranoid aspects of the people's imagination, which gather force as the demagogue encourages them to connect with powerful emotions.

Paranoia successfully reverses the course of anxiety. Fearful of being found out as corrupt and duplicitous, as sexist and racist, the paranoid cure for Trump is to find surrogates into whom those traits can be projected, and then to prosecute them. And to win an election – for *President* of the United States: what better cover-up than that? This is a type of model of cure for all citizens who feel that their failures can be transferred into others, whether it be shady financial dealings, offensive sexual relations, endemic and inherited hatred of people of colour or different gender or sexual orientation. Trump's "art of the deal" with the electorate was a quid pro quo in which a vote for him as president was an exoneration of all the crimes any self had committed.

And is it really any surprise that Trump's most famous verbal act – "You're fired!" – may well foretell his own impeachment? The fate of projective identifications is captured to some extent in the phrase, "What goes around, comes around." And yet, knowing that, Trump seems impatient with the process itself, egging it on, pushing it faster than need be, as if the laws of psychology irritate a man who, otherwise, would prefer to have everything his own way.

What might the Trump dynamic have to do with Brexit?

The decision of the British people to leave the European Union was understandable from a psychological point of view. For decades, many had felt the EU had increasingly come to represent the entitlement of a political elite in Brussels, who dictated to member countries too many aspects of everyday life – even which foods they could and could not eat – and imposed a punitive "value added tax". Its "value" to the average middle-class person seemed at best barely visible, and at worst a scam. With waves of migrants finding their way from North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, it was easy enough for a political leader, such as Nigel Farage of UKIP, to blame migrants for taking jobs, destroying the sense of community and generally muddying up the traditional British quality of life.

Encouraged by this interpretation of events, Brexit psychology migrated into British minds, disturbing what had been a sense of relative well-being. Soon the paranoid process was in full bloom: now it was tasty to hate, wonderfully cleansing – good riddance to bad rubbish! A bewildering world could be reduced to black and white (or whites versus blacks and shades of brown). In other words, Brexit was a vote to leave by the part of the self that was small-minded, vengeful and hate based. By confusing migrants with terrorists, by suggesting that the EU programme of open borders stole British jobs, a failing Tory government and disenchanted people who were indeed struggling to make ends meet (as they had for decades) had found their scapegoat. People far removed from the shores of this gentle isle were to blame. Surely.

Paranoid thinking works in the short term because it binds people around powerful affects, and simplifies complex ideas into digestible ones that appear cohesive and are therefore assumed to be correct. Through projection, it purifies selves of unwanted parts, so that what was internally disturbing – capable of producing persecutory anxiety, guilt and depression – is dumped into some faecal-other who can then be flushed from sight or annihilated.

When, for example, America nominated Iran for its "enemy of the decade" award, it selected a relatively weak military power that came with vehement anti-American rhetoric. Visibly foreign – definitely not a lookalike nation – it was clearly engaged in geopolitical terror politics, the poor man's version of a military. By picking on Iran as its enemy, America chose a weaker twin as an object into which it could project its xenophobia, military-muscle mentality and subversive activities. It could then depart with a squeaky clean sense of purity – realizing the American Dream at the expense of others: an almost perfect recycling programme.

So America *needed* Iran. Without its enemy twin the paranoid process would not work, and the binding, blinding force of that psychology could not be activated. Indeed, this would expose Americans to the dangerous prospect of self-examination, in which their "might is right" domination of the world might be subjected to intellectual challenge from

many sources, including some from within their own country. The constant search for new back-up enemies thus remains part of the military-industrial-psychological complex manned by hawks, in both the Republican and Democratic Parties, who scour the earth looking for baddies whom it is convenient to hate.

The paranoid move is a curiously adaptive mental action. It is a retreat from the complexity of the situation and the reality of external others, into an intensified intrasubjective relation. The self becomes absorbed by the relation of the "I" to the "me": the dialogic idiom of internal conversation. And the more the self feels isolated and alienated from others, the more this dispossession seems to confirm the logic of paranoid retreat.

Paranoia is a powerful passion. A sulking child, temporarily at odds with the parents, will retreat into a self-enclosed mood that visibly cuts the self off from the world. In these moments the child feels deeply assured of his righteousness, and he is soothed by an intrasubjective paranoid intimacy, a unique love relation between the self that speaks and the self that thinks. "Is anything wrong, honey?" the mother asks, to be met with a sultry and defiant "no".

By adolescence most of us stop our sulks. But retreat into paranoid intimacy can return if we find ourselves in a situation that is profoundly antipathetical to the self. Loyalty to the self produces a sort of *cri de coeur*, an oath made to a loved object, necessitated by embattlement with others who could attack us. As with depressive frames of mind, the paranoid self feeds on the negative, a form of intrasubjective breastfeeding; it turns to the breast of dark thoughts and is continuously nourished by them.

This involves a condensation of hateful feelings towards the world outside combined with intense love of the breast that has been constructed to provide succour in the internal world. Listening to the well-named "Rush" Limbaugh is like downing a double espresso of hate. Rush has done the hate work for his listeners, breathing it down his microphone in the voice of "outrage" – a well-named psychological action that is, ironically, a form of unconscious outreach.

In extreme circumstances, an individual caught up in chronic paranoid states of mind may permanently turn inwards and become a recluse, continuously imbibing poisonous thoughts from a dark breast, and celebrating isolation as an end in itself. Tragically, this internal poison can be projected outwards with extreme violence. This could be seen in the school and university massacres that followed from Columbine and Sandy Hook, in which seemingly ordinary kids had bred murderous thoughts towards their friends and then decided to put it all out there, for everyone to see. Mass murder had become a form of confession in America (and then in Norway and elsewhere) that the internal world itself could hatch extreme violence, without a nod to ISIS. Indeed, perhaps blowing the cover of other "perps" around the world, the "lone wolf" American kids who killed friends and revered teachers in model schools in suburban communities, seemed hell-bent on befuddling the American penchant for paranoid reasoning. These were crimes that were not hatched by people who hated America; indeed, they were a part of it. And so, what could be made of this? A quiet challenge was laid out to Americans – and those in other countries – to look inward to find the cause for these seemingly "senseless" murders.

Not everyone enacts their political disenchantment through mass murder. So what else are the millions of infuriated selves supposed to do? Perhaps they can find strength in numbers and a murderous form of politics that channels paranoid rage.

When political movements are based on paranoid ideas, the group process becomes all the more dangerous, as isolated selves discover that there are millions of other people who share the same views. The retreat into paranoia then becomes even more deeply assuring and confirming.

People who opt for a projective solution to the problems caused by complexity, know unconsciously that they have annihilated the group of ideas that do not fit into their paranoid narrowing of reality, together with the people who espouse them. The problem is that some of those ideas and people will previously have been objects of affection or even love. A young man who is converting to radical Islam through

paranoid isolation (finding his Rush Limbaugh in ISIS propaganda films) suffers from the breaking of love relations that comes with this mental move. Channelling love towards the new cause, and towards his fellow haters, allows the self to sustain love alongside powerful hate.

This is a striking and powerful throwback to the love and hate felt by the normal infant for his mother. When in physical or emotional pain, an infant will go into a rage and may for a time be inconsolable by even the most loving of parents. A frustrated toddler may blame the father or mother for a psychical situation that is entirely endogenous. But in time this splitting of the loved and the hated, the good mother-father and the bad mother-father, becomes integrated, and the child gradually realizes that the parent who is sometimes hated is the same parent who is also, for the most part, loved.

Melanie Klein called this the “depressive position” – a rather negative term for a positive maturational step – because to have these realizations is to be sobered by the reality of perception, and to be deprived of the joy of full-on hate and full-on love. In the paranoid movements we are discussing, therefore, we can see how the self gains a blissful return to a golden age in which it was normative to hate with fulsome embodied rage, and at the very same time to love with deep, passionate adoration of a sacred object.

Indeed, the arrival at a familiar place where these passions can co-exist, such as at a Trump rally, seems to furnish further mental proof of the validity of the paranoid process. For with love and hate operating in tandem like this, who could ever suffer defeat at the hands of the mealy-mouthed Democrats? Those who aim to oppose it threaten the bedrock of passion itself.

We turn now to another type of paranoid process, one that is harder to perceive. Unlike *positive paranoia*, in which the self espouses a clear view of the world, this is *negative paranoia*, where selves become ostensibly empty of personal views. These are replaced with a mission: to embody a blameless self, opposed to the vulgarities of life and allied with all that is virtuous. In its own way, negative paranoia is also a

response to the demands of complexity, and it too constitutes an attack on the democratic imperative.

Positive paranoia is most often to be found in right-wing movements, whereas negative paranoia is more typical of a certain disposition within the left wing. Paranoid right-wing thinkers ascribe evil intentions to those on the left; their left-wing paranoid counterparts occupy a position of sublime innocence, using common phrases to denounce others, implicitly exalting the self.

I attended the University of California, Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement in the 1960s, when many faculty and students played with the imagery of the polis of fifth-century Athens. We were a growing democracy, each person having an equal right to speak on the steps of Sproul Hall, or in any of our other meeting places. Unlike the anti-Vietnam War movement soon to follow, the FSM drew students of all political persuasions and backgrounds; it was limited to a very specific protest – the right to speak freely – and when that goal was accomplished, the movement disbanded.

Returning there in 2016 as a visiting lecturer, I was surprised to hear that the university was then in the midst of a so-called “anti-free speech movement”. Faculty were regularly being reported by students for “micro aggressions” and it was having a chilling effect on everybody’s ability to think and speak freely in the classroom.

The term “micro aggression” was coined in 1970 by psychiatrist and Harvard professor Chester M. Pierce, to describe unconscious insults and verbal injuries committed against African Americans. It was later adopted, and perverted, by the emerging “victims’ rights groups” that capitalized, both literally and figuratively, on what they perceived as any slight or aggressive gesture made by one group against another. By the second decade of the twenty-first century this movement was sweeping across university campuses in the United States.

At Berkeley and elsewhere, a micro aggression could be any statement made by a lecturer that might be upsetting to any student in the room. In order to prevent anyone from feeling offended or “traumatized”, faculty now had to issue “trigger alerts” before saying something that could

solutions to the problems posed by existential and social complexity.

Neither mental state permits participation in the democratic process, as neither is able to reflect upon and make use of ideas that are foreign to its own view. However, such frames of mind are part of a dynamic internal world – the self actively seeking to solve a problem – and they will therefore be labile and subject to potential change. It is generally possible for an individual to choose to opt out of such a position.

We have discussed how individuals faced with complexity may unconsciously tend towards paranoia because it simplifies matters. It also bears on that issue which identifies the political right in Europe and America in 2017: the fear and hatred of immigrants. That fear may exist in people in places such as Montana or Iowa, Northumberland or Cornwall, where there are virtually no immigrants. A Congressman from Iowa declared he wanted to live in an America “that is just so homogenous that we look a lot the same”.<sup>2</sup>

Although this looks like, and is, a form of racism, it is an ordinary response on the part of anyone to the arrival of a stranger into the community. A group that has met for a year of therapy may react to hearing that a new person is to join them with differing responses – one member might say “that’s great”, others might provide a more muted response, and some would say nothing. In fact no one wants to take on the unknown.

Unfortunately, paranoid retreat from complexity fates the paranoid to live within an increasingly isolated enclave, even if they are joined by millions of fellow recluses. In retreat from all who do not share the paranoid’s vision of reality, he regards others as “aliens” who threaten the hegemony of paranoia. Indeed, *anyone* with other ideas is a migrant seeking to cross the borders of the mind. They must be kept out at all costs because they threaten the paranoid’s construction of a defensive identity. This has been effective in providing the paranoid self with a powerful and pleasurable sense of cohesion in a world that otherwise seems contaminated by its opposite: by plurality.

A pluralistic vision drains the paranoid of the security provided by hatred of others. Confronted by *other* views, the paranoid feels – and indeed is – under threat, because the engine of paranoia depends on getting rid of unwanted contents, not on including the undesirable. It is a strategy that finds strength in the pleasure of its power. And once up and running it is exceedingly difficult to alter, unless those in this frame of mind can be brought into consistent verbal contact with selves who hold different views.

We turn now to the calcified trace of psychotic processes: to ideology.

Ideas that have been formed during mad times may remain dormant for decades or centuries, their *raison d’être* long gone. They may be revived by individuals who are not disturbed – not paranoid for example – but their coherence (their simplification of complexity) is attractive to those who wish to expedite matters for the sake of political advantage.

This book has sought to trace the development of certain frames of mind in the Western world over some two centuries. It has examined the paranoid frame of mind – always a possibility during any historical era – that has become increasingly attractive to Americans, who are cut off from the rest of the world in the first place, given to sanctimonious rectitude, and who habitually project their destructiveness into other nations whom they then fear. Although America profited from World War Two, and could claim sainthood for its role in defeating fascism and for the post-war generosity of the Marshall Plan, it had also deployed the atomic bomb, thereby releasing into the world the scourge of the most dangerous weapon ever invented.

In inheriting the wealth of other nations, as well as world domination through its “military–industrial complex”, the United States ingested a manic denial of the oppressive politics in the West that had ravaged the world for two centuries and launched Europe and then the rest of the world into its most destructive wars. It was now the “world leader”, but what was it leading? It led the way in a downward moral spiral that put profits before people, war before peace and blindness before insight.