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7

The Evil Eye, Envy, and Shame

On Emotions and Explanation

BENJAMIN KILBORNE

Throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East there persists today a powerful and fascinating belief system organized around the concept of the Evil Eye. Implicit in this belief system is the psychology of envy as the linchpin of human motivation, the keystone in the arch of human experience.

Why the belief systems organized around the Evil Eye are so powerful can be understood in the light of the distinction Gimbattista Vico made in 1744 between *il certo* (certainty) and *il vero* (truth). This, in turn, sheds light on Freud's 1919 paper on "The Uncanny" in which he speaks of the Evil Eye. However, there are distinctions to be made between the concept of envy in the psychoanalytic tradition and the concept of envy represented by Evil Eye belief systems. Both are equally important for clinicians, and both implicitly or explicitly conjoin the power of envy with the power of shame dynamics.

EVIL EYE RITUALS

The tradition of the Evil Eye and its functions in explanations for human misfortune and illness goes back thousands of years. One finds Mesopotamian (i.e., Assyrian and Babylonian) seals and amulets against the Evil Eye, as well as representations of the Evil Eye. In ancient and modern Egypt the symbolism of the Evil Eye is to be found not only in the iconography of Horus but also in numerous hieroglyphic writings. There is even an eye on the U.S. dollar bill, derived from beliefs of the freemasons and

intended perhaps to ward off envy. In the United States conspicuous consumption has so far outstripped beliefs in the Evil Eye that most people do not even notice the eye on the dollar bill; still less do they give credence to the cautionary practices prevalent elsewhere. The avoidance of the subject of envy in the United States may also have something to do with the Horatio Alger myth that everyone can become wealthy. Therefore, in a land where the wealthy are to be emulated (and they can be), nobody need be envious, and the seeming absence of envy on the cultural radar screen can be a reinforcement for illusions of democratic equality. However, our ideals of equality, perpetuated by the Horatio Alger myth, actually get in the way of civic and social responses to and responsibilities for real inequalities. In this respect envy and greed can feed on illusions of equality while deepening the divide between rich and poor, which has grown exponentially over the past two decades. The most obvious form in which envy appears (disguised) is in "healthy competition" (read destructive rivalry) over conspicuous consumption (keeping up with the Jones): I am not envious, I am competitive, and my financial success reinforces my right to exist. By contrast, those who are poor or fraught with financial insecurity are, according to prevailing American values, brought to question their existence itself. In this way, the predominance of materialistic values (represented, for example, by the importance ascribed to the gross national product) provides those who succeed financially with culturally sanctioned ways of defending against shame and vulnerability. In the process, however, the American emphasis on competition and money undermines social responsibilities and human bonds.

Notions of looks that kill are to be found throughout the world.[1] There is a Polish story in which the hero, cursed by the Evil Eye, blinds himself in order to keep his children from being injured by his looks. Beliefs in the Evil Eye were prevalent in ancient Greece and Rome. Pliny notes that special laws were put into place so that those using the Evil Eye to injure crops could be held responsible. This power was termed *fascinatio* in Latin, and from it is derived our word "fascination." Most will no doubt be familiar with a variety of folk tales that deal with lethal looks, one of the most familiar being that of Lady Godiva, who forbade all the villagers to watch her as she rode naked through the village. One peeping Tom dared look and was punished by being blinded.

Children and young animals were thought to be particularly vulnerable to the nefarious effects of the Evil Eye, beliefs widely prevalent in the Middle East and Mediterranean today. For example, in Lebanon and Turkey eye amulets against the Evil Eye are placed on newborn babies and on their cribs. These are passed from generation to generation, so sons and daughters inherit the amulets they will place on their children, and these will be passed down to their children and their children's children. Readers will also be familiar with the magical hex signs on barns to ward off the Evil Eye. Although far less in evidence today, these used to be widely

prevalent throughout the Western world (and elsewhere) until the Second World War.

But amulets were not the only means of warding off the Evil Eye. There are (and were) also gestures such as pointing one's forefingers in a fork at the one believed to have the Evil Eye, written charms often dissolved in water so that the afflicted might drink it, and spitting. For both the Greeks and the Romans spitting was a prevalent antidote to the poisons of the Evil Eye. According to Theocritus one must spit three times onto the chest of the person who is believed to be a potential victim of the Evil Eye.

Since the Evil Eye is thought to be rooted in envy, it is therefore believed to be imprudent to engage in any sort of conspicuous consumption or bragging. When praising anything the Italians would add *Si mal occhio non ci fosse* (may the Evil Eye not strike it), and the Romans *Praefiscini dixerim.* This expression was added after having praised oneself or complimented oneself and indicates that what was just spoken was meant neither as bragging nor as a challenge to the envious. Additionally, the word *Praefiscini* is derived from "fascinum, fascinare" from, which we get our words "fascinate" and "fascination."[2] What the Scots call "forespeaking" when praise is likely to bring on disease or misfortune can be illustrated by a number of rural sayings, such as the Somersetshire expression "I don't wish ee no harm, so I on't zay no more." Roger Bacon writes: "the times when the stroke ... of an envious eye does most hurt are particularly when the party envied is beheld in glory and in triumph."[3]

THE EVIL EYE, ILLNESS, AND MISFORTUNE

Within the anthropological world, it is striking that to my knowledge there does not exist a major study of the Evil Eye as a belief system. Belief systems can be defined as those structures of thinking that circumscribe a familiar conceptual world and dictate assumptions. Generally speaking, psychoanalysts neither cite works on belief systems nor use the term at all. This is a shame, since the term provides us with ways of speaking within the same frame about religious beliefs and those beliefs characterized as "superstitions." In addressing the subject of the Evil Eye, Freud characterizes Evil Eye beliefs as "superstitions." In so doing he is drawing on a long history of thought categories in the West. The Judeo-Christian tradition is "religious," as are the other "religions" studied by comparative religion. Although Lowie (1924) and others have written on "primitive religion" in order to dignify what was regarded as "superstition," the distinction has clung to discourse in the social sciences and politics, and to this day has the ring of "us" (we have religion) versus "them" (they have superstition). We can see this, for example, in the speeches of President George W. Bush when he speaks of Islam. The pope, like President Bush, also calls up the specter of the crusades and their war against "the infidels."

In this chapter I will be focusing on the concept of belief systems in order to better provide a perspective on Freud's approach to the subject of the Evil Eye, and to speak about Evil Eye belief systems as social and cultural phenomena with a life and power that Freud did not allow himself the freedom to understand.

A variety of sources refer to practices that are collected in various works on magic, divination, and healing, but none of them describe the functions of beliefs in the Evil Eye as a part of an explanatory system designed to account for human suffering, uncertainty, and illness, and as a way of making human feelings recognizable.

Let me illustrate the functioning of beliefs in the Evil Eye with an example from my fieldwork in Morocco. As an anthropologist (and psychoanalyst to be), I was interested in dreams and dream interpretation as they relate to conceptions of illness and healing throughout the Mediterranean. I found that there are in Morocco two separate and distinct systems of dream interpretation, one by and for men based on the Koran and on principles of religious literacy and learning, and the other by and for women based on oral traditions (as distinct from Koranic authority) and including beliefs in the Evil Eye and the social functions of jealousy. I was in the position of being the foreign anthropologist in a society in which many activities segregated the sexes. As a man how was I to find a female field assistant who could take the dreams I wanted interpreted as a series to a woman specializing in the interpretation of dreams?

After considerable effort, I at last persuaded Aysha, an illiterate young woman in the Souss, a rural region in the High Atlas mountains roughly southwest of Marrakesh and east of Agadir, to be my field assistant. The inhabitants of the Souss are known to be profoundly attached to their land and place and also to have networks of grocery stores throughout Morocco and the French-speaking world. Those who do travel to Moroccan cities like Rabat inevitably build houses in which to retire in the Souss.

Aysha spoke both French and Berber and agreed to take the dreams I gave her in French and present these to a Berber female dream interpreter. The dreams in question were two dreams drawn from the Freudian corpus—the dream of the dead father (Freud's own dream) and the dream of the officer. The second, on which the interpretation focused, is one included in Freud's "Introductory Lectures."

> An officer in a red cap was running after her in the street. She fled from him, and ran up the stairs with him still after her. Breathless, she reached her flat, slammed the door behind her and locked it. He stayed outside, and when she looked through the peephole, he was sitting on a bench outside and weeping. (Freud, 1916/1974, p. 192)

The interpretation of the wise woman ran as follows: "The dream represents an obstacle (resistance) in the life of the dreamer, in her love-life

particularly. Red is a lucky color in this dream. The dream was provoked by jealousy (i.e., the Evil Eye)" (cited in Kilborne, 1978a, p. 218).

When Aysha returned from the consultation she was thoroughly shaken. Not only had the woman interpreter/healer assumed the dreams to be Aysha's, but interpreted them in such a way as to overwhelm her through an interpretation of the effects of the Evil Eye on her relationships with men. The following is the narrative of the consultation.

The wise woman (who was illiterate) gave Aysha a talisman and instructed her to wash it in water until the letters and markings were dissolved. The "dreamer" was then to pour this water over a piece of red-hot iron heated in red-hot coals. These acts were to be performed in order to eliminate the "resistance" which the dream represented and about which the interpreter was to become increasingly specific.

It was a jealous and envious woman who put this "resistance" in the path of the dreamer, explained the interpreter. At this point in the consultation the "dreamer" admitted that there was, in fact, an envious person in her own family: her aunt. Once in possession of this bit of Souss family dynamics, the interpreter zeroed in with that sort of understanding of Souss family dynamics that only those brought up there could possess.

"Have you been to Casablanca?" asked the interpreter. "Yes," was the answer. From here, and because going to Casablanca meant going into dangerous territory, the interpreter grew more certain. "The day you intended to leave for Casa, your aunt touched you on your right shoulder with a gri-gri (a talisman), and she put another on the threshold of the doorway you were to pass through. When you got to Casablanca, you were suddenly dizzy; a sort of black veil seemed to appear before your eyes." Remember, the Souss is a seriously rural community, and Casablanca is the big city that is likely to produce dizziness in those who have known little but the wind in the hills, the rustle of trees, and the songs of birds.

Continuing, the interpreter pressed on. "Your aunt did this to hex your trip to Casablanca. The spell she cast also made you fickle. You passed from one boy to another, incapable of choosing among them. Even now you cannot make up your mind."

Disconcerted, Aysha ruefully admitted that the interpreter was right. In fact, she *had* felt dizzy in Casablanca, where she had planned to stay more than 4 days but had to cut her stay short, and she *did* have the impression that her relations with boys were jinxed.

In concluding the consultation, the interpreter/healer affirmed that 3 days previously Aysha had gotten into an argument with her boyfriend and that since neither had been able to speak. Again, Aysha said this was accurate. Whereupon the interpreter gave the girl a gri-gri to counter the effects of the Evil Eye and sent her on her way.

In this example the Evil Eye is used to explain misfortune, dizziness, fear of the big city, the girl's fickle nature, indecision, her problems with relationships, and the disappointments and hopes that she holds.[4] Seldom in a single consultation are we as analysts able to cast so wide a net, whatever

our interpretations or theoretical orientation. The extraordinary effect of the consultation calls attention to the powerful and multidimensional functions of beliefs in the Evil Eye, and the importance of envy as a point of entry into the world of the emotions. It also calls attention to the power of envy, which it is the purpose of this essay to explore.

FREUD, "THE UNCANNY," AND THE EVIL EYE

It is a well-known fact that Freud's ideas about psychoanalysis grew out of his interest in hypnotism and occult phenomena in general, an interest widespread at the turn of the century. This widespread interest and fascination represented a real enthusiasm for and curiosity about the life and power of the mind, one which today is easy to underestimate. The very term psychoanalysis comes from the Greek *psuche*, meaning breath, the source of life. Psychoanalysis was, as Bettelheim and others have pointed out, a treatment for the soul.

When Freud wrote his paper on "The Uncanny," his aim was to explore what makes feelings powerful. Implicitly, he was exploring the bounds of psychoanalysis and its links to ideas about the soul, traditionally the province of religion. One of the reasons for the success of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was precisely its reach: dreams traditionally were viewed as the means by which gods communicated with mortals, the means by which the Christian God and Jewish Yaweh made their wishes known. Freud sought to open the exploration of dreams so that he could describe them and explore their meanings with all of the passion of the naturalist, while at the same time appealing to those steeped in religious traditions. In this he was making use of the Judeo-Christian belief systems whose assumptions about the life of the soul (and the importance of tending to the soul) provide a backdrop to his magnum opus.

Freud's paper is of particular importance for the subject of the Evil Eye because of the associative materials Freud adduces in addressing and exploring the subject of the uncanny. Implicitly Freud links envy and shame through his discussion of the German word *heimlich* and through his interest in what makes feelings powerful. He identifies a dimension of the uncanny as "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others." This sounds like secret shame, and the shame of secrets. And then Freud continues:

> To do something *heimlich*, i.e., behind someone's back; to steal away *heimlich*; *heimlich* meetings and appointments; to look on with *heimlich* pleasure at someone's discomfiture; to sigh or weep *heimlich*; to behave *heimlich*, as though there was something to conceal; *heimlich* love-affair, love sin; *heimlich* places (which good manners oblige us to conceal) (1 Sam, v. 6). The *heimlich* chamber (privy) (2 Kings x. 27). Also "The *heimlich* chair" ... "The *heimlich* art" (magic) ... "A holy, *heimlich* effect." (1919, pp. 223–224)

Note here the biblical references, as well as the references to meanings relating to secrecy, toilets, concealment, love and sin, pleasure at someone else's discomfiture—all within the scope of shame dynamics. As though this were not sufficient, Freud amasses yet more biblical references. "'In the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me *heimlich*' (Ps. Xxvii.5) ... *Heimlich* parts of the human body, pudenda ...' the men that died were smitten on their *heimlich* parts' (1 Sam. V. 12)."

Freud speaks of E. T. A. Hoffman's story of the Sand Man in which the theme of lethal looks and blindness (both motifs related to shame and destructiveness) appear clearly. The Sand Man is:

> a wicked man who comes when children won't go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he puts the eyes in a sack and carries them off to the half-moon to feed his children. They sit up there in their nest, and their beaks are hooked like owls' beaks, and they use them to peck up naughty boys' and girls' eyes with. (p. 228)

Elsewhere I have explored in detail the links between shame and looking, a link essential to an understanding of the Evil Eye (Kilborne, 2002).

After having discussed in detail stories of the double, another motif directly related to shame and superego conflict, Freud speaks of the Evil Eye in a manner evoking the Hoffman story and in the context of his remarks on superstition. "One of the most uncanny and wide-spread forms of superstition is the dread of the Evil Eye" (1919, p. 240). And Freud continues:

> Whoever possesses something that is at once valuable and fragile is afraid of other people's envy, insofar as he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. A feeling like this betrays itself by a look even though it is not put into words; and when a man is prominent owing to noticeable, and particularly owing to unattractive, attributes, other people are ready to believe that his envy is rising to a more than usual degree of intensity, and that this intensity will convert it into effective action. What is feared is thus a secret intention of doing harm, and certain signs are taken to mean that intention has the necessary power at its command. (p. 240)

Although this passage, like so much of the work of Freud in English translation, is awkwardly rendered, several features stand out. First, Freud is trying to speak of very strong feelings as a part of the theory of the quality of feelings that he addressed at the outset of the paper. Second, he explains the intensity of feeling as a result of projected envy rather than, for example, the result of collective belief systems, shared cultural values, or legitimate mistrust. This is but one manifestation of Freud's disinclination to address the problem of belief systems. Third, the fear he associates with the intensity of feeling is "a secret intention of doing harm." This would appear to explain the power of envy through a theory

of aggression and cruelty, and to explain away human destructiveness as the manifestation of the fear of inner destructiveness. This is important because Freud seems to be saying that the primary reason envy is powerful is because of internal drives rather than either the innate power of the feeling of envy or the power of envy in human relationships. Fourth, that the Evil Eye is associated with ways of reading human experience, a sort of divination through the reading of signs, which, one might infer, is distinctly different from the more rational scrutiny of the human experience embodied in psychoanalysis. And finally, Freud's material for this paper is drawn above all from literature and philology and from the Bible, as though these sources allowed him better to address his primary subject: a theory of the quality of feelings.

Stepping back for a moment from Freud's discussion of the Evil Eye and of the uncanny, consider his approach to the study of dreams, which also in important respects walks a thin line between reason and belief, science and religion, religion and superstition.

In the early Christian period, Christ became a healer in order to "absorb" the healing component in the cult of Asclepius. This, of course, Freud knew so well, since he explicitly set himself up as Asclepius, the God who heals through dreams, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. But Freud also wanted to present his book as scientific. Hence, the seeming paradox: On the one hand he could present himself as a part of our ancient and classical (as well as Mesopotamian) tradition of healing, thereby drawing on enormous resources in our cultural imagination, while at the same time claiming a "scientific" status for his discipline.

Conflicts between science and magic, religion and superstition in the West have a very long history. Studies of incubation[5] or temple sleeping (the sleeping in sacred places in order to dream cures to ills, whether infertility, misfortune, deafness, or migraines) and studies of tarantism (the cult of dancing in southern Italy) demonstrate how linked with the history of Western civilization both are, and how many and how various are the overlaps. As De Martino (2002) observes apropos of tarantism in southern Italy, it struck root in Apulia where particular importance was attributed to musical catharsis and where the vigorous Christian polemic against pagan orgiastic cults resulted, paradoxically, in their absorption by Christianity. "Tarantism was grafted into two great polemics in the West: that of Christianity against the orgiastic cults and that of the new science against natural and ceremonial magic" (De Martino, 2002, p. 247). Despite the rise of science, these orgiastic and healing cults of antiquity have persisted in various forms to this day.[6]

Anthropological and historical sources are in accord concerning the syncretism of religion and science; one never fully replaces the next, as one religion invariably absorbs essential features of the one that preceded it. Why would psychoanalysis be any different?

Significantly, the first allusion to Freud's paper "The Uncanny" can be found in a letter to Sandor Ferenczi of May 12, 1919, in which Freud writes

that "The Uncanny" has been completed. This is important for several reasons because it was Ferenczi above all the other members of Freud's circle who was focusing his efforts on what Freud refers to in the opening paragraph as "the theory of the qualities of feeling" (1919/1974, p. 219). The year 1919 was a turning point in the history of psychoanalysis, although it has almost disappeared from the view of contemporary writers. In the spring of that year Ferenczi married Gisella Palos, was given the first chair in psychoanalysis (at the University of Budapest), and was president of the International Psychoanalytic Association whose meetings in the fall would be devoted to the subject of war trauma. Freud's letter to Ferenczi, therefore, marks a high water mark of their friendship and collaboration; Freud's approach to the subject of the uncanny (with all the biblical and religious references) reflects a freedom to explore the unknown and the fringes of psychoanalytic understanding, which is virtually unequaled in his later writings.

In the summer of 1919 (after Freud writes his paper on "The Uncanny"), there was a revolution in Hungary, Ferenczi was stripped of his post, and in the Fall of 1919 at Freud's insistence, the presidency of the IPA was transferred to Ernst Jones, Farenczi's analysand. Subsequently the analytic community forgot that Ferenczi had ever been president of the International Psychoanalytic Association, and effectively erased him and the events of the year 1919 from its memory.[7]

The events of 1919, coupled with divergences between their clinical work and their theories, together with strains in their personal relationship, set Freud and Ferenczi on diverging paths. From this point on, Freud distanced himself from Ferenczi and never again would consider the question of what makes feelings powerful with the same reach into the nether regions of *heimlich* and shame.

ENVY AND SHAME

In the Kleinian tradition, it is commonly believed that envy is the linchpin of emotions, as it is in Evil Eye belief systems. But there are important differences between the two.

First, Klein and the Kleinians use envy as an offshoot of Freud's theory of drives. Children, their argument goes, are envious because they are sexual beings whose bodies are unable to satisfy their urges and needs. In these theories, envy is a function of the theory of drives rather than an emotion with power in its own right that deserves to be understood in its interpersonal context as well as from the vantage point of individual psychodynamics.

Therefore (and here I am extrapolating), because of the shame of children's dependency (and this is a theory of shame that makes shame an epiphenomenon of envy rather than a phenomenon in its own right), children come to envy those who have (or are imagined to have) the powers they themselves do not possess. Evil eye explanations, by contrast, inevitably

designate a particular person in the patient's world as the source of the misfortune, evil, or sickness. Evil eye explanations are, as it were, two-person explanations and rely on shared belief systems.

Also, in the example we have cited of Aysha and her consultation with the wise woman, shame plays an important role. Aysha, a country girl who goes to the big city and is disoriented and frightened, feels she cannot have a satisfying love life and is deficient. The Evil Eye represents an explanation for her feelings of deficiency and shame over her limitations and functions to make them more tolerable. By ascribing to her difficulties a "cause" (her envious aunt), she can represent her feelings of shame to herself more easily and tolerate them because they can be recognized (i.e., by the wise woman).

Second, Klein's theory of envy implies the existence of primary narcissism, the weaning of which gives rise to envy. This developmental emphasis is nowhere to be found in Evil Eye explanations, which concentrate only on the here and now of the patient's situation. The thrust of explanation in Evil Eye belief systems focuses only on the present misfortune to be born; there is no room for references to the past except as direct illuminations of the present. And there is no concept whatsoever of infant and child development.

Third, Evil Eye explanations seek specifically to answer the question: Why am I sick, unhappy, or distressed? Here it is worth noting that asking the question in such a form implies feelings of sickness, unhappiness, and distress that are reinforced and validated by the availability of the question itself. For us, such questions are often thought to be the province of religion and not of science. In the light of our Souss example, Aysha's experience of having her unhappiness laid out before her can be attributed to the wise woman's assumption that the dreams she brought meant unhappiness to be explained and made sense of.

Although some psychoanalytic writers have dismissed Evil Eye beliefs as pathological, epistemologically, societies cannot be pathological in the same way that individuals are, so the very labeling of social practices and beliefs as "pathological" raises serious difficulties for students of the philosophy of the social and human sciences. When psychoanalysis strives for a *global* view and understanding of psychodynamics, conflating group and social phenomena with drive-oriented individual psychodynamics, it inevitably distorts its object. The concept of culturally constituted defenses was promulgated by Melford Spiro (Kilborne & Langness, 1987) several decades ago in theoretical papers of direct relevance for psychoanalysis. Such defenses can be shared; cultural values often serve not only to rationalize defenses and make them invisible to members of the society of which they are a part, but also to provide such defenses with powers of social (and individual) coherence and conviction.

Fourth, despite claims that Kleinian and indeed all psychoanalysis is essentially individualistic and that we are champions of individual freedom, the kind of social science explanatory system on which we rely

would seem to be less specific and less personal than those of religious belief systems. The questions Why me? Why now? are the primary focus of what we may call Evil Eye explanatory systems. Although such non-European belief systems are known for their want of individualism and their reliance on group processes and collective symbols and representation, this emphasis (Why me? Why now?) seems to be more specifically individualistic than, for example, the explanation of envy as a manifestation of drives.

A discussion of the Evil Eye necessarily entails an exploration of the destructiveness of envy and shame, shame over both omnipotence and surfeit and over helplessness and deficit. The question what makes envy destructive is therefore close to the question what makes shame destructive.

In his recent book on shame and jealousy the British analyst Phil Mollon (2002) brings the work of Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut together around the notion of shame, associating the destructiveness of shame and envy (Klein) with the healing properties of empathy. Although there is some merit to the position that shame can be caused by want of empathy and cured by empathy, such a position tends to distort or neglect internal and often unconscious superego conflicts and psychic disorientation. Those who hold to this position believe *the cure* lies in the other: for the patient suffering from toxic shame, the problem and *the pain* lies in the other.

As many writers have stressed (e.g., Wurmser, Lansky, Kilborne, Morrison), there is a direct link between feelings of shame and feelings of failure. Failure produces shame, as it stems from self-judgments (ego ideals). Shame experiences are by definition anxiety filled fears of being ashamed, and being ashamed is the very mark of failure. Just as chronic pain calls up fear of pain and anxiety over pain, so chronic shame experiences are filled with anxiety over the feelings of shame themselves, which, when toxic, are unbearable. What cannot be sufficiently emphasized is that feelings of failure and shame can become toxic when they form maelstroms, pulling the self down into itself. When this happens, Object Relations suffer and can become both impossible and threatening.

For those of us who struggle with all the ambiguities, conflicts, and uncertainties of shame dynamics, the precept that there is no single antidote to shame (such as empathy) may itself serve as a source of shame and humiliation for patients whose confusion results in shame-prone vulnerabilities. As I have explained elsewhere (Kilborne, 2002), clinicians are faced with the intractable dilemma of shame: the more ashamed one is, the more ipso facto one depends on fantasies and perceptions of how one is being seen. This, in turn, exacerbates shame vulnerabilities and contributes to narcissistic/paranoid defenses by attributing to the other powers he or she cannot and does not have as an attempted antidote to feelings of deficiency, limitation, and defect in oneself. The result often looks like envy.

As Wurmser (2000) has so pertinently noted, shame is directly related to the power of the inner judge. If the analyst, relying on notions that only

empathy can cure shame, calls up or exacerbates the power of the inner judge in the patient, who condemns himself for not being sufficiently empathic or for thwarting the analyst's reliance on the power of his (the analyst's) powers of empathy, then the result will be damaging.

VICO, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND EXPLANATION

Today many assume that because they do not believe in God, or because they accept the worldview of science, they do not need to acknowledge the explanatory powers of the divinity. Whereas it is the goal of natural science to dispel ignorance and explain rationally explicable phenomena like the movements of the heavens or the falling of an apple, the objectives of belief systems are fundamentally different and depend on asking fundamentally different questions. Broadly speaking, science tends to be based on what can be observed or experimentally replicated. Belief systems, on the other hand, depend on forces unseen and impossible to know except through the emotions. Only belief systems address the questions Why me? Why now?

Freud never addresses squarely the matter of how psychoanalysis might approach the subject of belief systems, although he does address the question of a *Weltanschauung* in his 1932 paper. However, he does so only by asking whether or not psychoanalysis is a *Weltanschauung*, not by wondering how psychoanalytic understanding might illuminate belief systems. He concludes his paper by observing: "Psycho-analysis, in my opinion, is incapable of creating a Weltanschauung of its own. It does not need one; it is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific *Weltanschauung*" (1932, p. 181).

As Giambatista Vico (1744) noted in the 18th century, there is a fundamental distinction to be made between, on the one hand, *coscienza* consciousness or conscience, and on the other hand, *scienza*, knowledge or science. The object of *coscienza* is *il certo*, or certainty; the object of *scienza* is *il vero* or the truth in the sense of universally applicable principles.[8]

A fundamental implication of this distinction involves the emotions. Emotions are pertinent for *il certo* because the concept and the epistemological domain it designates stem from *coscienza*, consciousness and conscience (both the same word in Italian and French). Our English distinction between the two words makes Vico's argument more difficult to understand. For Vico, emotional knowledge (what lies within the "modifications of the human mind") is an essential part of his argument. In fact, Vico makes emotions and consciousness the object of "certainty" (*il certo*), as opposed to the rational knowledge of the natural world (*il vero*). Setting himself against the rationalism of Descartes, Vico sees the origin of language, not in any rational need to formulate ideas, but rather in the emotions of awe and terror brought on by a violent thunderstorm. A primitive man and woman are sitting in a cave, unable to speak. There is a

terrifying thunderstorm, with lightning and deafening cracks of thunder. Suddenly, and in response to overwhelming feelings, the man (a tenor?) bursts into song, the origin of language.

As Vico explains:

> Men at first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and agitated spirit, finally they reflect with a clear mind. This axiom is the principle of poetic sentences, which are formed by feelings of passion and emotion, whereas philosophic sentences are formed by reflection and reasoning. The more the latter rise towards universals, the closer they approach the truth; the more the former descend to particulars, the more certain they become. (pp. 75–76 sections 218–219)

There are clearly many implications of Vico's distinction for psychoanalysis. One is that the world of men can be known, and that the natural world (the world God made) can never be understood with "certainty" (*il certo*), because it is awe-inspiring and beyond human grasp. Therefore, Vico is suggesting that too narrow a focus on the natural world to the exclusion of the human world is a sort of hubris, a manifestation of a sort of sclerosis of reason that does not allow for the passions or for the unknown and is quite implicitly anti-Cartesian. Whereas Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method* made monolithic doubt the centerpiece of his system and method, Vico made the distinction between two kinds of knowledge (*il vero* and *il certo*) the centerpiece of his. Also, for Descartes there is only one form of truth and certainty: that arrived at by doubting the testimony of the senses. This makes Descartes a closet sensualist in the cloak of a rationalist. Additionally, the method of Descartes does away with the distinction, so prevalent from the Renaissance to the 19th century, between the moral and the physical sciences. The result, if looked at globally, is to make reason scientific and science reasonable; it is to make knowledge only what can be proven and viewed as acceptable when seen in the light of prevalent theories of causality and logic.[9] Vico's anti-Cartesian stance sets him at odds with the entire sensualist-rationalist tradition; his approach can be seen to depart fundamentally from structuralist, poststructuralist, deconstructionist, and modernist assumptions, as well as from the assumptions of rational choice theorists, behaviorists, cognitivists, and neurobiologists. Much social science is predicated on observation that excludes the emotions of the observer as an essential part of what is observed. From Vico's perspective, such approaches therefore leave out *il certo*.

As he observes at the end of his book, "this Science [meaning the New Science of Man of which he writes] carries inseparably with it the study of piety, and that he who is not pious cannot be truly wise" (Vico, 1744, p. 426, section 1112). In other words, for Vico the human world is inscribed in the natural world, the domain of piety and awe. However, the human world can be known and understood, whereas its larger context can be grasped only insofar as it is given to humankind to understand universal

principles and laws, and this understanding is subject to human limitation. To recognize that there is a basic distinction between the world of mankind and the natural world is, therefore, a basic act of piety; to conflate the two, as the empirical and sensualist tradition tends to do, is an expression of impiety and ignorance.

In what is perhaps the most memorable passage in the book, Vico writes:

> But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know. (p. 96, section 331)[10]

Such an epistemological distinction is clearly present in the Moroccan material we have discussed, and fundamental to our notions of psychoanalytic interpretation and explanation. Psychoanalysis has historically positioned itself somewhere between these two. It admits the power of the emotions (drives being derived from theories of animal magnetism, mesmerism, hypnotism, paranormal phenomena, and fears of primitive promiscuity), while presenting explanations that seek to satisfy behaviorally scientific criteria (e.g., they can be observable and replicable). By contrast, behaviorism does away with the distinction and the tension between the two orders of explanation, making observation and universal principles the primary criterion for reliability and legitimacy, and thereby neglecting the internal world of thoughts and feelings, the world of human experience (Vico, 1984).

The recent attacks on psychoanalysis by Grunbaum (1985) and others have accused psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts of failure to present sufficient "evidence" to validate a presumed scientific "method." However, for clinicians (as opposed to those who do not have live patients in front of them), the psychoanalytic method, because it seeks to make emotions more bearable and therefore to use its explanatory system in the service of helping patients to recognize their own feelings and be less anxious about them, must do double duty: It must at once satisfy scientific criteria of validity and help equilibrate the world of the emotions. Therefore, its effectiveness in the first can be at odds with its effectiveness in the second, and vice versa.

Let me illustrate the conflict between explanatory worlds with an example from *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* by the Oxford social anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940/1976). Evans-Pritchard notes that the Zande[11] (who occupied a portion of what used to

be the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan) build their houses on posts, which sometimes give way. Evans-Pritchard tried to explain to the Zande that these posts were eaten by termites, and therefore the termites were the problem. However, the Zande were in no way satisfied by this explanation, since it was impersonal and depended on seeing termites as agents of destruction: termites were the cause and the collapse of a house was the effect. For the Zande, the real question was: Why was *that* particular person sitting under the house at *that* particular time when *that* particular house collapsed? Were a Westerner to explain to the Zande that the cause of the collapse was termites, the Zande would not understand why such an irrelevant fact could be put forward as useful, since it left the primary question unanswered.

It is therefore obvious in view of this example that explanations can be valued according to the kind of question asked. To the question Why do apples fall?, we have a ready answer: because of gravity. But that does not explain why *that* particular apple fell on *my* head (and not on the head of someone else) on *this* particular day and not another. This specificity of explanation is one of the resources of our psychoanalytic explanation and lends importance to the here and now of the transference and to analytic interactions. But we are unlikely ever to be able to defend our emphasis on transference against behaviorist critics who do not understand the questions we must ask as part of the exercise of our profession. However, this does not mean that we cannot muster more effective arguments against our detractors and defend out virtues with greater vigor than we have been able to do thus far. But it does imply epistemological considerations that help explain the difficulties that psychoanalysis faces in the contemporary world.

THE POWER OF ENVY AND SHAME: PARANOIA, EXPLANATION, AND INTERPRETATION

As I hope to have suggested thus far, much can be learned about the dynamics of envy and shame through a study of the Evil Eye. What makes the Evil Eye dangerous? What makes it powerful? How does its dangerousness and power shed light on envy? And how do belief systems such as the Evil Eye provide resources for human bonds and object relations?

As I have written elsewhere (Kilborne, 2002), much of what psychoanalysis has termed paranoia is directly related to shame and superego conflict. Therefore, the tendency to dismiss Evil Eye phenomena as paranoid leaves out the shame dimensions. Without an understanding of the Evil Eye as a belief system (including its shame dynamics), the phenomenon of the Evil Eye is reduced to "envy projected" and labeled paranoia. Once it has been so labeled, it is an easy step to dismissing it as "superstition," and therefore without any basis in reality. When Freud was writing there was great emphasis on reality. Reality (whatever it is construed to mean)

becomes split between those who speak of psychic reality (Freud and those who follow him) on the one side and those who speak of social reality (Durkheim and his followers) on the other. Furthermore, "reality" is assumed to be higher on the scale of human development (progress) than "superstition." From the psychoanalytic perspective of Freud, the social dimension of Evil Eye experiences and their potential for communication are missed, and theories of psychic structure and drives can be relied on to fill in the missing pieces. This trend in psychoanalysis has persisted to the present day and can be seen in the writings of those who claim to be sensitive to cultural differences and traditions in psychoanalytic treatment yet omit the dimensions of shame dynamics, culturally constituted defenses, collective experience, and collective representations.

Such reductionism was, clearly, a hallmark of the social sciences at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, when the "scientific" status of the various disciplines needed to be established. Durkheim, Halbwachs, Levy-Bruhl, and others focused on the collective dimension of human experience (social solidarity, collective representations, and so forth), but left out the internal conflictual dimensions.

Such reductionism further clouded the basic epistemological distinction made by Vico in his *The New Science*; it focused attention on *either* the individual *or* the social (but never the two in the same frame). The beauty of Vico's formulation is that it throws into relief the distinction, not between the individual and culture but rather between *il certo* and *il vero*.

The assumption that beliefs in the Evil Eye can be subsumed under our rubric of paranoia implies that they undermine object relations. As we have seen, the very opposite is the case. In societies where beliefs in the Evil Eye prevail, these can at once provide explanations for human misfortune and suffering and, because they entail shared values, actually reinforce human bonds. Inasmuch as this might be so, then the problem lies with those who would attach a label of projection, superstition, and paranoia to the complex phenomena and collective representations of the Evil Eye. It would be problematic because the very labeling suggests that the labelers do not recognize important dimensions of social experience and resources for human bonds, and also because they repeat the unfortunate distinction between us (who have religion) and them (who have only superstition).

For a variety of epistemological reasons, the psychoanalytic concept of projection is problematic. Literally, projection means getting something from here to there, getting a projectile from point A to point B. To do so one needs a source of power or force. In the example "I hit you" it is obvious that "I" is the actor and you are being acted upon. However, in the Freudian and psychoanalytic concept of projection, the power resides in the aggressive wishes of the one being acted upon. As a result the "actor" is implicitly turned into a fantasy of the "acted upon," whose aggressive drives are what is most powerful and most to be feared. The inside has

triumphed over the outside; internal phenomena are real, whereas outside phenomena are epiphenomena.

Paradoxically, then, it is the danger and power (aggressive drives?) of the one injured that takes center stage, not the danger of the one doing the injuring. Victim becomes victimizer. The concept is further muddied by the Kleinian emphasis on projective identification.

By contrast, the Italian concept of *Jettatore* is far more parsimonious as an explanation since it incorporates the notion of throwing or hurling and is unambiguous about who is doing what to whom. The angry powerful one is doing the hurling, and the receiver of what is hurled is at risk of injury. Also, the concept is clear about the role of envy as the motivating force of the *Jettatore*. What gives the *Jettatore* power is the power of envy, which is both implicitly and explicitly assumed in Evil Eye belief systems.

To say that what gives envy power is projection and paranoia, which is what Freud and others have implied, is to miss the power of envy itself as an extremely powerful emotion related to internal judgments and superego condemnations and, therefore, to the basic sense of identity. It is also to miss the power of shame, the shame, among other dynamics, of feeling envious (and the anxiety of feeling without). Shame dynamics constitute an essential part of the cultural values and defenses so prominent in Evil Eye phenomena.

Shame is powerful for a variety of reasons. In toxic forms it can threaten the right to existence, and undermine the feeling that object relations can be possible and worthwhile. Envy can be a badge of unrecognized shame; one wants from others what one feels one lacks oneself and must have. Rather than feel the lack, one feels envious, as though the other has wrongly deprived oneself of exactly what was needed. When we associate the feeling of envy with the dangerousness and superstitiousness of others, are we not using the concept of envy as our Western way of avoiding feelings of loss and limitation? And are these associations and this avoidance not then further defended against by turning the envy that we associate with the Evil Eye into paranoia, and then suggesting that societies privileging envy as an explanatory system are paranoid and not individualistic? The implication being that we are not to be thought of as envious (since we have so much others want), and that others are somehow lesser because their envy is dangerous and ours is not, they are paranoid and we are not.

Envy as a response to intolerable feelings of limitation, loss, and deficit thus comes bundled with shame and resentment. And, as beliefs in the Evil Eye demonstrate so abundantly, envy and shame can both be directly related to looking and being seen, to the theme of lethal looks.

But if looking can be associated with lethal looks, and looks can be dangerous, so too can not looking. In fact, not looking can have devastating consequences for child development. Relating envy and looking to unlovability and the shame it causes, it would appear that the unresponsiveness of parents or caregivers to an infant or child leads to fantasies of omnipotence in

the child (who believes that he or she can make the parent adequate and undo the injury), which then makes looking that much more shameful. If the child feels that others who look will detect his or her omnipotence, the response will be to hide and feel envious of those who can be proudly visible (i.e., those who do not need to hide).

Unresponsiveness leads to shame, which causes omnipotent fantasies to grow, and omnipotent fantasies breed yet more shame. Under these circumstances, when omnipotent defenses are challenged, human frailty, blindness, and fallibility become that much more threatening and shameful. In this way envy can be relied on to avoid feelings of limitation and loss, since the focus is on not allowing others to see one's omnipotence (itself a defense against unbearable shame over feelings of limitation and loss).[12]

How then are unresponsiveness, envy, and looking, particularly lethal looking, related?[13] If it is the response of loved ones to one's shameful feelings that allow them to be tolerated, then nonresponse on the part of parents or caregivers reflects an intolerance of their shameful feelings, which comes out as an intolerance of the responses of children to feeling unseen and unrecognized, and, consequently, unlovable.[14]

Nonresponse, often organized around eyes that do not see, leads to an experience of soul blindness on the part of those on whom one depends for faith in human connections. This experience, in turn, makes one dependent on those who cannot see, and therefore who cannot see the one looking to them for response (linking blindness and nonresponse to shame). Such disorientation leads at once to hiding and rage at not being able to find the person looking, which then makes the looks of the disoriented that much more threatening to them. Enter envy. Envy then steps in to provide an orientation and defense against feelings of disorientation and disconnection, both sources of shame.

NOTES

1. See Kilborne (2002) for a discussion of the dynamics of lethal looks and their relation to narcissism.
2. I am indebted to Leon Wurmser for invaluable assistance with the translation of this passage, and for the links to our words "fascinate" and "fascination."
3. See "Evil Eye" in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* 10th edition. The references cited in this section can mostly be found in this entry. For additional references to the Evil Eye and practices associated with it see, for example, Doutte (1909), Fahd (1966), Peristiany (1965), and Westermarck (1926/1968).
4. Although the girl had to memorize the dreams because she could not read, and then translate them into Berber, and allowing for slippage, her strong emotions over the consultation were beyond the slightest doubt. For her the experience was extremely powerful.

5. For a discussion of contemporary incubation practices see Kilborne (1978b, 1990). For a discussion of Greek incubation, see Edelstein and Edelstein (1945).
6. The contemporary cults of physical fitness and the cult of the body represent thinly disguised efforts at staving off the effects of aging and defending against anxieties over death, just as are the Evil Eye belief systems, the cult of tarantism, or the cults of incubation practiced to this day throughout the Mediterranean.
7. Roughly 10 years ago I learned that Horatio Etchegoyen, then the president of the International Psychoanalytic Association, realized that Ferenczi's picture was not among those in London of the presidents of the International Psychoanalytic Association. A number of analysts wondered if Ferenczi had ever been the president of the IPA. These events of 1919 were, I have come to understand, essential for an understanding of the history of psychoanalysis; their importance cannot be denied and neither can their repression.
8. For Vico, knowledge of the natural world, perceived through the five senses, is associated with the passions and with what men can know from the inside, as it were. In the 18th-century tradition of the sensualists (e.g., Hume, Locke, Helvetius, La Mettrie (*L'Homme Machine*), however, the two kinds of knowledge are conflated, and empirical observation is held up as the standard by which the reliability of knowledge can be judged.
9. There is some irony is Heisenberg's choice of terms when he describes "the Uncertainty Principle." In the light of Vico, what Heisenberg is studying is necessarily uncertain, since it can only be "true."
10. Vico elaborates on the origin of gods in the following passage: "Thus it was fear which created gods in the world; not fear awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened in men by themselves" (1984, p. 120, section 382).
11. Evans-Pritchard refers to the tribe as the Azande, and groups of individuals as the Zande.
12. Soul-blindness of a person on whom one depends leads them to suffering in isolation, and experiences of being altogether cut off, like Philoctetes of Sophocles, alone on the island with oozing wounds, caught up in the agony of his pain.
13. Use of pain to defend against deeper pain of shame and vulnerability; physical symptoms to hide omnipotence. If only I felt better, everything would be fine. But nothing is fine, and the reality of the horror and tragedy cannot be avoided without consequence.
14. In addition, such shameful feelings call up anxiety over loss and limitation.

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8

"Evil Eye" and "Searing Look"

Jealousy, Envy, and Shame in the Magic Gaze

HEIDRUN JARASS AND LÉON WURMSER

In this essay we will expand on Benjamin Kilborne's anthropological and philosophical study of the Evil Eye by adding additional evidence for the widespread belief in the magically powerful eye and for the psychodynamics involved in it. Clinical and literary experience allows a broader interpretation of the underlying dynamics of the Evil Eye and related phenomena than just by projected envy. Jealousy appears to be an equally important factor, as is more generally the projection of various aspects of superego condemnation, not only in the direction of guilt but cardinally in that of shame: I.e., not only is the eye, and by extension the entire face the powerfully effective carrier of dangerous emotions like envy and resentment, but it is also the organ par excellence of shaming and with that also a paramount herald of superego sanctions, seemingly from the outside, yet very poignantly by externalization of inner accusation and self-blame. In its turn, this superego condemnation is rooted in traumatic early experiences of shaming and blaming—the devastating look of annihilating dehumanization and instrumentalization. Yet, if we think of the negative force of eye and face we also must consider its opposite: the charismatically effective, love and enthusiasm inspiring look and facial expression.

Both versions are clearly rooted in some deeply magic experiences of the omnipotence of thought, perception, and gesture—a form of cognitive and perceptual regression ("topographic regression" [Freud, 1900/1953/1968]). Thinking, perceiving, and being perceived are processes that have become

Jealousy and Envy

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