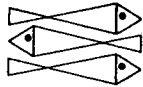


M

ALICE MILLER

(For Your Own Good)

*Hidden Cruelty
in Child-Rearing
and the Roots
of Violence*



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Contents

<i>Preface to the American Edition</i>	vii
<i>Preface to the Original Edition</i>	xiii
HOW CHILD-REARING CRUSHES SPONTANEOUS FEELINGS: GLIMPSES OF A REVERED TRADITION	
<i>"Poisonous Pedagogy"</i>	
INTRODUCTION	3
BREEDING GROUNDS OF HATRED: GUIDES TO CHILD-REARING FROM TWO CENTURIES	8
Summary	58
THE "SACRED" VALUES OF CHILD-REARING	63
THE CENTRAL MECHANISM OF "POISONOUS PEDAGOGY": SPLITTING OFF AND PROJECTION	79
<i>Is There a Harmless Pedagogy?</i>	
GENTLE VIOLENCE	92
PEDAGOGY FILLS THE NEEDS OF PARENTS, NOT OF CHILDREN	96
THE LAST ACT OF THE SILENT DRAMA: THE WORLD REACTS WITH HORROR	
<i>Introduction</i>	105
<i>The War of Annihilation against the Self</i>	
THE LOST OPPORTUNITY OF PUBERTY	107
THE SEARCH FOR THE SELF AND SELF-DESTRUCTION THROUGH DRUGS: THE LIFE OF CHRISTIANE F.	109
THE HIDDEN LOGIC OF ABSURD BEHAVIOR	129

<i>Adolf Hitler's Childhood: From Hidden to Manifest Horror</i>	
INTRODUCTION	142
HITLER'S FATHER: HIS HISTORY AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS SON	147
HITLER'S MOTHER: HER POSITION IN THE FAMILY AND HER ROLE IN ADOLF'S LIFE	180
Summary	195
<i>Jürgen Bartsch: A Life Seen in Retrospect</i>	
INTRODUCTION	198
"OUT OF THE CLEAR BLUE SKY?"	202
WHAT DOES A MURDER TELL US ABOUT THE CHILDHOOD OF THE MURDERER?	207
THE WALLS OF SILENCE	231
<i>Concluding Comments</i>	240
STEPS ON THE PATH TO RECONCILIATION: ANXIETY, ANGER, AND SORROW—BUT NO GUILT FEELINGS	
<i>Unintentional Cruelty Hurts, Too</i>	247
<i>Sylvia Plath: An Example of Forbidden Suffering</i>	254
<i>Unlived Anger</i>	261
<i>The Permission to Know</i>	271
<i>Afterword</i>	277
<i>Bibliography</i>	281

Preface to the American Edition

THIS BOOK is appearing in America some two and a half years after its first publication in Germany, and it is probably just as well that it wasn't available before now in this country. Had it appeared here earlier, American readers might well have asked: "Why should we still bother with Hitler today? That's all ancient history," and "Who is this Christiane F.?" But now, after so many young Americans have seen their own tragedies mirrored in the film and book about Christiane F., the teenage German drug addict, and after all the talk in the media the past few years about the danger of nuclear war, it should come as no surprise that I have chosen Adolf Hitler and Christiane F. as representatives, respectively, of extreme destructiveness on a world-historical scale and of extreme self-destructiveness on a personal one.

Since the end of World War II, I have been haunted by the question of what could make a person conceive the plan of gassing millions of human beings to death and of how it could then be possible for millions of others to acclaim him and assist in carrying out this plan. The solution to this enigma, which I found only a short while ago, is what I have tried to present in this book. Readers' reactions to my work convinced me how crucial others find this problem too and how the terrifying stockpiling of nuclear weapons worldwide raises the same question in an even more acute form: namely, what could motivate a person to misuse power in such a way as to cause, completely without scruples and with the use of beguiling ideologies, the destruction of humanity, an act that is alto-

gether conceivable today? It can hardly be considered an idle academic exercise when somebody attempts to expose the roots of an unbounded and insatiable hatred like Hitler's; an investigation of this sort is a matter of life and death for all of us, since it is easier today than ever before for us to fall victim to such hatred.

A great deal has already been written about Hitler by historians, sociologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts. As I attempt to show in the pages that follow, all his biographers have tried to exonerate his parents (particularly his father), thus refusing to explore what really happened to this man during his childhood, what experiences he stored up within, and what ways of treating other people were available as models for him.

Once I was able to move beyond the distorting perspectives associated with the idea of a "good upbringing" (what is described in this book as "poisonous pedagogy") and show how Hitler's childhood anticipated the later concentration camps, countless readers were amazed by the convincing evidence I presented for my view. At the same time, however, their letters expressed confusion: "Basically, my childhood differed little from Hitler's; I, too, had a very strict upbringing, was beaten and mistreated. Why then didn't I become a mass murderer instead of, say, a scientist, a lawyer, a politician, or a writer?"

Actually, my book provides clear answers here, although they often seem to be overlooked: e.g., Hitler never had a single other human being in whom he could confide his true feelings; he was not only mistreated but also prevented from experiencing and expressing his pain; he didn't have any children who could have served as objects for abreacting his hatred; and, finally, his lack of education did not allow him to ward off his hatred by intellectualizing it. Had a single one of these factors been different, perhaps he would never have become the arch-criminal he did.

On the other hand, Hitler was certainly not an isolated phenomenon. He would not have had millions of followers if they had not experienced the same sort of upbringing. I antici-

pated a great deal of resistance on the part of the public when I advanced this thesis—which I am convinced is a correct one—so I was surprised to discover how many readers, both young and old, agreed with me. They were familiar from their own backgrounds with what I depicted. I didn't have to adduce elaborate arguments; all I needed to do was describe Hitler's childhood in such a way that it served as a mirror, and suddenly Germans caught their own reflections in it.

It was the personal nature of their responses to the three examples I present in my book that enabled many people to understand in a more than purely intellectual sense that every act of cruelty, no matter how brutal and shocking, has traceable antecedents in its perpetrator's past. The diverse reactions to my book range from unmistakable "aha" experiences to angry rejection. In the latter cases, as I have already indicated, the following comment keeps recurring like a refrain: "I am living proof that beating [or spanking] children is not necessarily harmful, for in spite of it I became a decent person."

Although people tend to make a distinction between "spanking" and "beating" a child, considering the former a less severe measure than the latter, the line between the two is a tenuous one. I just heard a report on an American radio station about a man—a member of a Christian fundamentalist sect in West Virginia—who "spanked" his son for two hours. The little boy died as a result. But even when a spanking is a gentler form of physical violence, the psychic pain and humiliation and the need to repress these feelings are the same as in the case of more severe punishment. It is important to point this out so that readers who receive or give what they call "spankings" will not think they or their children are exempt from the consequences of child beating discussed in this book.

Probably the majority of us belong to the category of "decent people who were once beaten," since such treatment of children was a matter of course in past generations. Be that as it may, to some degree we can all be numbered among the survivors of "poisonous pedagogy." Yet it would be just as false to deduce from this fact of survival that our upbringing caused us no harm as it would be to maintain that a limited nuclear war

would be harmless because a part of humanity would still be alive when it was over. Quite apart from the culpably frivolous attitude toward the victims this view betrays, it also fails to take into account the question of what aftereffects the survivors of a nuclear conflict would have to face. The situation is analogous to "poisonous pedagogy," for even if we, as survivors of severe childhood humiliations we all too readily make light of, don't kill ourselves or others, are not drug addicts or criminals, and are fortunate enough not to pass on the absurdities of our own childhood to our children so that they become psychotic, we can still function as dangerous carriers of infections. We will continue to infect the next generation with the virus of "poisonous pedagogy" as long as we claim that this kind of upbringing is harmless. It is here that we experience the harmful aftereffects of our survival, because we can protect ourselves from a poison only if it is clearly labeled as such, not if it is mixed, as it were, with ice cream advertised as being "For Your Own Good." Our children will find themselves helpless when confronted with such labeling. When people who have been beaten or spanked as children attempt to play down the consequences by setting themselves up as examples, even claiming it was good for them, they are inevitably contributing to the continuation of cruelty in the world by this refusal to take their childhood tragedies seriously. Taking over this attitude, their children, pupils, and students will in turn beat their own children, citing their parents, teachers, and professors as authorities. Don't the consequences of having been a battered child find their most tragic expression in this type of thinking?

Although the general public is beginning to understand that this suffering is transmitted to one's children in the form of an upbringing supposedly "for their own good," many people with whom I have spoken in the United States still believe that permissive methods of child-rearing allow children "too much" freedom and that it is this permissiveness, not "poisonous pedagogy," that is responsible for the marked increase in crime and drug addiction. Even cartoons and jokes make fun of parents who have a tolerant and supportive attitude toward their

children, emphasizing the dangers if parents allow themselves to be tyrannized by their children. King Solomon's mistaken belief (if you spare the rod you will spoil the child) is still accepted today in all seriousness as great wisdom and is still being passed on to the next generation. These attitudes, although they now take a more subtle and less apparent form, are not far removed from those quoted in the following pages to illustrate the detrimental effects of child-rearing methods. Such views have not been borne out by my many years of experience. Theoretically, I can imagine that someday we will regard our children not as creatures to manipulate or to change but rather as messengers from a world we once deeply knew, but which we have long since forgotten, who can reveal to us more about the true secrets of life, and also our own lives, than our parents were ever able to. We do not need to be told whether to be strict or permissive with our children. What we do need is to have respect for their needs, their feelings, and their individuality, as well as for our own.

It is no mere accident that all three of the people I write about in this book had no children of their own. One of my readers wrote to me: "Who knows, perhaps the Jews would not have been sent to the gas ovens if Hitler had had five sons on whom he could have taken revenge for what his father did to him." We punish our children for the arbitrary actions of our parents that we were not able to defend ourselves against, thanks to the Fourth Commandment. I have discovered that we are less a prey to this form of the repetition compulsion if we are willing to acknowledge what happened to us, if we do not claim that we were mistreated "for our own good," and if we have not had to ward off completely our painful reactions to the past. The more we idealize the past, however, and refuse to acknowledge our childhood sufferings, the more we pass them on unconsciously to the next generation. For this reason, I attempt to point out in these pages some underlying connections, with the hope of breaking a vicious circle. For a decisive change could well come about in our culture if parents would only stop combating their own parents in their children, often

when the latter are still infants—something they do because *their* parents were able to attain a position of guiltlessness and inviolability by forcible means, i.e., thanks to the Fourth Commandment and to the methods of child-rearing they employed.

On a recent trip to America I encountered many people, especially women, who have discovered the power of their knowledge. They do not shrink from pointing out the poisonous nature of false information, even though it has been well concealed for millennia behind sacrosanct and well-meaning pedagogical labels. The conversations I had in the United States gave support to my own experience that courage can be just as infectious as fear. And if we are courageous enough to face the truth, the world will change, for the power of that “poisonous pedagogy” which has dominated us for so long has been dependent upon our fear, our confusion, and our childish credulity; once it is exposed to the light of truth, it will inevitably disappear.

A.M.

November 1982

Preface to the Original Edition

THE most psychoanalysis is able to do—according to a typical reproach—is help a privileged minority, and only to a very limited extent at that. This is certainly a legitimate complaint as long as the benefits derived from analysis remain the exclusive property of a privileged few. But this need not be the case.

The reactions to my first book, *Prisoners of Childhood: The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self*,* convinced me that resistance to what I have to say is no greater outside the psychoanalytic community than among members of the profession—in fact, the younger generation of the lay public shows perhaps even more openness to my ideas than do my professional colleagues. Reflecting on this, I realized how essential it is to make the insights gained from analysis of a few available to the public at large rather than hide these insights away on dusty library shelves. Thus, I decided to devote the next several years of my life to writing.

I am primarily interested in describing everyday situations occurring outside the psychoanalytic setting that can, however, be more fully understood if viewed from a psychoanalytic perspective. This does not mean applying a ready-made theory to society, for I believe I can truly understand a person only if I hear and feel what he or she is saying to me without hiding or barricading myself behind theories. Depth psychology practiced both on others and on ourselves provides us as analysts with insights into the human psyche that accompany us every-

* Published in hardcover in 1981 by Basic Books, New York, as *Prisoners of Childhood*; now available in paperback under the original title, translated from the German: *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. This is also the title of the British edition.

"Now while the lashes are still fresh in your Konrad's mind, I advise you to take advantage of it. When you come home, see that you order him about a good deal. Have him fetch you your boots, your shoes, your pipe, and take them away again; have him carry the stones in the yard from one place to another. He will do it all and will become accustomed to obeying." [Salzmann (1796), quoted in Rutschky]

Do the pastor's comforting words sound that outdated? Wasn't it reported in 1979 that two-thirds of the German population are in favor of corporal punishment? In England, flogging has not yet been prohibited in the schools and is accepted as routine in the boarding schools there. Who will bear the brunt of this humiliating treatment later when the colonies are no longer there to perform this function? Not every former pupil can become a teacher and attain revenge in this way . . .

SUMMARY

I have selected the foregoing passages in order to characterize an attitude that reveals itself more or less openly, not only in Fascism but in other ideologies as well. The scorn and abuse directed at the helpless child as well as the suppression of vitality, creativity, and feeling in the child and in oneself permeate so many areas of our life that we hardly notice it anymore. Almost everywhere we find the effort, marked by varying degrees of intensity and by the use of various coercive measures, to rid ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within us—i.e., the weak, helpless, dependent creature—in order to become an independent, competent adult deserving of respect. When we reencounter this creature in our children, we persecute it with the same measures once used on ourselves. And this is what we are accustomed to call "child-rearing."

In the following pages I shall apply the term "*poisonous pedagogy*" to this very complex endeavor. It will be clear from

the context in question which of its many facets I am emphasizing at the moment. The specific facets can be derived directly from the preceding quotations from child-rearing manuals. These passages teach us that:

1. Adults are the masters (not the servants!) of the dependent child.
2. They determine in godlike fashion what is right and what is wrong.
3. The child is held responsible for their anger.
4. The parents must always be shielded.
5. The child's life-affirming feelings pose a threat to the autocratic adult.
6. The child's will must be "broken" as soon as possible.
7. All this must happen at a very early age, so the child "won't notice" and will therefore not be able to expose the adults.

The methods that can be used to suppress vital spontaneity in the child are: laying traps, lying, duplicity, subterfuge, manipulation, "scare" tactics, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliating and disgracing the child, scorn, ridicule, and coercion even to the point of torture.

It is also a part of "poisonous pedagogy" to impart to the child from the beginning false information and beliefs that have been passed on from generation to generation and dutifully accepted by the young even though they are not only unproven but are demonstrably false. Examples of such beliefs are:

1. A feeling of duty produces love.
2. Hatred can be done away with by forbidding it.
3. Parents deserve respect simply because they are parents.
4. Children are undeserving of respect simply because they are children.
5. Obedience makes a child strong.
6. A high degree of self-esteem is harmful.
7. A low degree of self-esteem makes a person altruistic.
8. Tenderness (doting) is harmful.

9. Responding to a child's needs is wrong.
10. Severity and coldness are a good preparation for life.
11. A pretense of gratitude is better than honest ingratitude.
12. The way you behave is more important than the way you really are.
13. Neither parents nor God would survive being offended.
14. The body is something dirty and disgusting.
15. Strong feelings are harmful.
16. Parents are creatures free of drives and guilt.
17. Parents are always right.

When we consider the major role intimidation plays in this ideology, which was still at the peak of its popularity at the turn of the century, it is not surprising that Sigmund Freud had to conceal his surprising discovery of adults' sexual abuse of their children, a discovery he was led to by the testimony of his patients. He disguised his insight with the aid of a theory that nullified this inadmissible knowledge. Children of his day were not allowed, under the severest of threats, to be aware of what adults were doing to them, and if Freud had persisted in his seduction theory, he not only would have had his introjected parents to fear but would no doubt have been discredited, and probably ostracized, by middle-class society. In order to protect himself, he had to devise a theory that would preserve appearances by attributing all "evil," guilt, and wrongdoing to the child's fantasies, in which the parents served only as the objects of projection. We can understand why this theory omitted the fact that it is the parents who not only project their sexual and aggressive fantasies onto the child but also are able to act out these fantasies because they wield the power. It is probably thanks to this omission that many professionals in the psychiatric field, themselves the products of "poisonous pedagogy," have been able to accept the Freudian theory of drives, because it did not force them to question their idealized image of their parents. With the aid of Freud's drive and structural theories, they have been able to continue obeying the commandment they internalized

in early childhood: "Thou shalt not be aware of what your parents are doing to you."*

I consider the impact of "poisonous pedagogy" on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis so crucial that I intend to treat this theme much more extensively in another book (cf. page xvi). For now I must limit myself to stressing how important it is that we all be aware of the effect of the commandment to refrain from placing blame on our parents. This commandment, deeply imprinted in us by our upbringing, skillfully performs the function of hiding essential truths from us, or even making them appear as their exact opposites. The price many of us must pay for this is severe neurosis.

What becomes of all those people who are the successful products of a strict upbringing?

It is inconceivable that they were able to express and develop their true feelings as children, for anger and helpless rage, which they were forbidden to display, would have been among these feelings—particularly if these children were beaten, humiliated, lied to, and deceived. What becomes of this forbidden and therefore unexpressed anger? Unfortunately, it does not disappear, but is transformed with time into a more or less conscious hatred directed against either the self or substitute persons, a hatred that will seek to discharge itself in various ways permissible and suitable for an adult.

The little Katies and Konrads of all time have always been in agreement as adults that their childhood was the happiest

* I did not arrive at this insight until quite recently and solely on the basis of my psychoanalytic experiences. I was surprised to find striking corroboration in Marianne Krüll's fascinating book, *Freud und sein Vater (Freud and His Father)* (1979). Krüll is a sociologist who is not satisfied with theories; she tries to combine knowledge and experience. She visited Freud's birthplace, stood in the room where he spent his first years of life with his parents, and, after reading many books on the subject, attempted to *imagine* and *feel* what the child Sigmund Freud must have stored up in his mind in this room.

Since the appearance of my book in Germany, other books have appeared in the United States that also point to Freud's drive theory as a denial of what he had discovered to be true; for example, Florence Rush, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse in Children* (McGraw-Hill, 1980); and Leon Sheleff, *Generations Apart: Adult Hostility to Youth* (McGraw-Hill, 1981).

period of their life. Only with today's younger generation are we seeing a change taking place in this regard. Lloyd de Mause is probably the first scholar who has made a thorough study of the history of childhood without glossing over the facts and without invalidating the results of his research with an idealizing commentary. Because this psychohistorian has the ability to empathize, he has no need to repress the truth. The truth laid bare in his book, *The History of Childhood*, is sad and depressing, but it holds hope for the future: those who read this book and realize that the children described here later turned into adults will no longer find the atrocities in human history hard to understand. They will locate the places where the seeds of cruelty have been sown and by virtue of their discovery will conclude that the human race need not remain the victim of such cruelty forever. For, by uncovering the unconscious rules of the power game and the methods by which it attains legitimacy, we are certainly in a position to bring about basic changes. The rules of the game cannot be fully comprehended, however, unless we develop an understanding of the hazards of early childhood, that time when the ideology of child-rearing is passed on to the next generation.

Without a doubt, the conscious ideals of young parents of the present generation have changed. Obedience, coercion, severity, and lack of feeling are no longer recognized as absolute values. But the road to the realization of the new ideals is frequently blocked by the need to repress the sufferings of one's childhood, and this leads to a lack of empathy. It is precisely the little Katies and Konrads who as adults close their ears to the subject of child abuse (or else minimize its harmfulness), because they themselves claim to have had a "happy childhood." Yet their very lack of empathy reveals the opposite: they had to keep a stiff upper lip at a very early age. Those who actually had the privilege of growing up in an empathic environment (which is extremely rare, for until recently it was not generally known how much a child can suffer), or who later create an inner empathic object, are more

likely to be open to the suffering of others, or at least will not deny its existence. This is a necessary precondition if old wounds are to heal instead of merely being covered up with the help of the next generation.

The "Sacred" Values of Child-Rearing

It also gives us a very special, secret pleasure to see how unaware the people around us are of what is really happening to them.

ADOLF HITLER

PEOPLE who have grown up within the value system of "poisonous pedagogy" and have remained untouched by psychoanalytic insights will probably respond to my antipedagogic position with either conscious anxiety or intellectual rejection. They will reproach me for being indifferent to "sacred" values or will say that I am displaying a naïve optimism and have no idea just how bad children can be. Such reproaches would come as no surprise, for the reasons behind them are all too familiar to me. Nevertheless, I would like to comment on the question of indifference to values.

Every pedagogue accepts as a foregone conclusion that it is wrong to tell a lie, to hurt or offend another human being, and to respond in kind to parental cruelty instead of showing understanding for the good intentions involved, etc. On the other hand, it is considered admirable and right for a child to tell the truth, to be grateful for the parents' intentions and overlook the cruelty of their actions, to accept the parents' ideas but still be able to express his or her own ideas independently, and above all not to be difficult when it comes to what is expected of him or her. In order to teach the child these almost universal values, which are rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, among others, adults believe they must

Adolf Hitler's Childhood: From Hidden to Manifest Horror

My pedagogy is hard. What is weak must be hammered away. In my fortresses of the Teutonic Order a young generation will grow up before which the world will tremble. I want the young to be violent, domineering, undismayed, cruel. The young must be all these things. They must be able to bear pain. There must be nothing weak or gentle about them. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from their eyes. I want my young people strong and beautiful. That way I can create something new.

ADOLF HITLER

Introduction

MY desire to learn more about Adolf Hitler's childhood did not emerge until I began to write this book, and it took me quite by surprise. The immediate occasion was the realization that my belief, based upon my experience as an analyst, that human destructiveness is a reactive (and not an innate) phenomenon either would be confirmed by the case of Adolf Hitler or—if Erich Fromm and others are right—would have to be completely revised. This question was important enough for me to try to answer, although I was very skeptical at first that I would be able to summon up empathy for this human being, whom I consider the worst criminal I have ever known of. Empathy, i.e., in this case the attempt to

identify with the perspective of the child himself and not to judge him through adult eyes, is my sole heuristic tool, and without it, the whole investigation would be pointless. I was relieved to discover that for the purposes of my study I was successful in keeping this tool intact and was able to regard Hitler as a human being.

To do this, I had to free myself from thinking of "what is human" in traditional and idealizing terms based on splitting off and projecting evil; I had to realize that human being and "beast" do not exclude each other (cf. the Erich Fromm quotation on page 177). Animals do not suffer from the tragic compulsion of having to avenge, decades later, traumata experienced at an early age—as was the case, for example, with Frederick the Great, who was driven to become a great conqueror after the terrible humiliation he suffered as a child. In any event, I am not familiar enough with an animal's unconscious or its degree of awareness of its past to make any statements on the subject. So far, it is only in the *human* realm that I have discovered extreme bestiality; only there can I trace it and search for its motives. And I cannot renounce this search unless I am willing to be made into an instrument of cruelty, i.e., its unsuspecting (and thus guiltless yet blind) perpetrator and propagator.

If we turn our backs on something because it is difficult to understand and indignantly refer to it as "inhuman," we will never be able to learn anything about its nature. The risk will then be greater, when we next encounter it, of once again aiding and abetting it by our innocence and naïveté.

Over the past thirty-five years, countless works dealing with the life of Adolf Hitler have appeared. No doubt, I heard more than once that Hitler was beaten by his father, and even read it several years ago in a monograph by Helm Stierlin without being particularly struck by the fact. Since I have become sensitive, however, to the demeaning treatment children are sometimes subjected to in the first years of life, this information has taken on much greater importance for me. I asked myself what the childhood of this person had been like, a person who was possessed by hatred all his life and for

whom it became so easy to involve other people in his hatred. As a result of reading *Schwarze Pädagogik* and of the feelings it awakened in me, I was suddenly able to imagine and feel what it must have been like for a child growing up in the Hitler household. What had previously been a black-and-white film was now in color, and it gradually merged to such an extent with my own experiences of World War II that it ceased being a film and turned into real life. This was not only a life that had been lived at a certain time and place in the past but one whose consequences and whose likelihood of being repeated I believe concern us all here and now as well. For the hope that by means of rational agreements it might be possible in the long run to prevent nuclear annihilation of the human race is at bottom a form of irrational wishful thinking and contradicts all our experience. As recently as the Third Reich, not to mention countless times before that, we have seen that reason constitutes only a small part of the human being, and not the dominant part, at that. All it took was a Führer's madness and several million well-raised Germans to extinguish the lives of countless innocent human beings in the space of a few short years. If we do not do everything we can to understand the roots of this hatred, even the most elaborate strategic agreements will not save us. The stockpiling of nuclear weapons is only a symbol of bottled-up feelings of hatred and of the accompanying inability to perceive and articulate genuine human needs.

The example of Hitler's childhood allows us to study the genesis of a hatred whose consequences caused the suffering of millions. The nature of this destructive hatred has long been familiar to psychoanalysts, but psychoanalysis will be of little help as long as it interprets this hatred as an expression of the death instinct. The followers of Melanie Klein, who in spite of their very accurate description of infantile hatred still define it as innate (instinctual) and not reactive, are no exception. Heinz Kohut comes closest to interpreting the phenomenon with his concept of narcissistic rage, which I have

related to the infant's reaction to the lack of availability of the primary care giver.

But we must go one step further if we are to understand the origins of a lifelong insatiable hatred such as consumed Adolf Hitler. We must leave the familiar territory of drive theory and address the question of what takes place in a child who is humiliated and demeaned by his parents on the one hand and on the other is commanded to respect and love those who treat him in this fashion and under no circumstances to give expression to his suffering. Although something so absurd would scarcely be expected of an adult (except in pronouncedly sadomasochistic relationships), this is exactly what parents expect of their children in most cases, and in previous generations they were rarely disappointed. In the earliest stage of life, it is possible for a child to forget about the extreme acts of cruelty he or she has endured and to idealize their perpetrator. But the nature of the subsequent enactment reveals that the whole history of early persecution was stored up somewhere; the drama now unfolds in front of the spectators with an amazing resemblance to the original situation but under another guise: in the reenactment, the child who was once persecuted now becomes the persecutor. In psychoanalytic treatment, the story is enacted within the framework of transference and countertransference.

If psychoanalysis could only free itself of its stubborn belief in the death instinct, it would be able to begin to answer the question of why wars occur, on the basis of material available on early childhood conditioning. Unfortunately, however, most psychoanalysts are not interested in what parents did to their children, leaving this question to family therapists. Since the latter in turn do not work with transference but concentrate primarily on modifying interactions among family members, they seldom gain the access to events of early childhood possible in a thoroughgoing analysis.

In order to show how the early debasement, mistreatment, and psychological rape of a child expresses itself

throughout later life, I would need only to recount the history of a single analysis down to the last detail, but considerations of discretion make this impossible. Hitler's life, on the other hand, was observed and recorded so exactly by so many witnesses up to the very last day that this material can easily be used to demonstrate the enactment of the early childhood situation. In addition to the testimony of witnesses and the historical events in which his deeds are documented, his thoughts and feelings were expressed, albeit in coded form, in his many speeches and in his book *Mein Kampf*. It would be a highly instructive and rewarding task to make Hitler's entire political career comprehensible from the perspective of the history of his persecution in early childhood. But to pursue this task is far beyond the scope of this book, since my sole interest here is in showing examples of the effects of "poisonous pedagogy." For this reason I shall restrict myself to a few highlights in his biography; in so doing, I shall attribute particular significance to certain childhood experiences that until now have received little attention from his biographers. Because historians by profession concern themselves with external facts, and psychoanalysts with the Oedipus complex, few seem to have seriously raised the question: What did this child *feel*, what did he *store up* inside when he was beaten and demeaned by his father every day from an early age?

On the basis of available documents, we can easily gain an impression of the atmosphere in which Adolf Hitler grew up. The family structure could well be characterized as the prototype of a totalitarian regime. Its sole, undisputed, often brutal ruler is the father. The wife and children are totally subservient to his will, his moods, and his whims; they must accept humiliation and injustice unquestioningly and gratefully. Obedience is their primary rule of conduct. The mother, to be sure, has her own sphere of authority in the household, where she rules over the children when the father is not at home; this means that she can to some extent take out on those weaker than herself the humiliation she has suffered. In the totalitarian state, a similar function is assigned to the

security police. They are the overseers of the slaves, although they are slaves themselves, carrying out the dictator's wishes, serving as his deputies in his absence, instilling fear in his name, meting out punishment, assuming the guise of the rulers of the oppressed.

Within this family structure, the children are the oppressed. If they have younger siblings, they are provided with a place to abreact their own humiliation. As long as there are even weaker, more helpless creatures than they, they are not the lowest of slaves. Sometimes, however, as was the case with Christiane F., the child is ranked below the dog, for the dog need not be beaten if a child is available.

This hierarchy, which can be observed in the way concentration camps were organized (with their ranking of guards, etc.) and which is legitimized by "poisonous pedagogy," is probably still maintained in many families today. The possible consequences for a sensitive child can be traced in detail in the case of Adolf Hitler.

Hitler's Father

HIS HISTORY AND HIS RELATIONSHIP

WITH HIS SON

IN his biography of Adolf Hitler, Joachim Fest has this to say about Alois Hitler's background and his life before Adolf was born:

At House No. 13 in Strones, the home of Johann Trummelschlager, an unmarried servant girl by the name of Maria Anna Schicklgruber gave birth to a child on June 7, 1837. That same day the child was baptized Alois. In the registry of births in Döllersheim parish the space for the name of the child's father was left blank. Nor was this changed five years later when the mother married the unemployed journeyman miller Johann Georg Hiedler. That same year she turned her son over to her

The way Hitler unconsciously took on his father's behavior and displayed it on the stage of world history is indicative of how the child must really have seen his father: the snappy, uniformed, somewhat ridiculous dictator, as Charlie Chaplin portrayed him in his film and as Hitler's enemies saw him, is the way Alois appeared in the eyes of his critical son. The heroic Führer, loved and admired by the German people, was the other Alois, the husband loved and admired by his subservient wife, Klara, whose awe and admiration Adolf no doubt shared when he was still very little. These two internalized aspects of his father can be identified in so many of Adolf's later enactments (in connection with the "heroic" aspect, we need only think of the greeting "Heil Hitler," of the adoration of the masses, etc.) that we receive the impression that throughout his later life his considerable artistic talents impelled him to reproduce his earliest—deeply imprinted, though unconscious—memories of a tyrannical father. His portrayal is unforgettable for everyone who was alive at the time; some of his contemporaries experienced the dictator from the perspective of the horror felt by a mistreated child, and others from the perspective of an innocent child's complete devotion and acceptance. Every great artist draws on the unconscious contents of childhood, and Hitler's energies could have gone into creating works of art instead of destroying the lives of millions of people, who would then not have had to bear the brunt of this unresolved suffering, which he warded off in grandiosity. Yet, in spite of his grandiose identification with the aggressor, there are passages in *Mein Kampf* that show the way Hitler experienced his childhood.

In a basement apartment, consisting of two stuffy rooms, dwells a worker's family of seven. Among the five children there is a boy of, let us assume, three. . . . The very narrowness and overcrowding of the room does not lead to favorable conditions. Quarreling and wrangling will very frequently arise. . . . But if this battle is carried on between the parents themselves, and almost every day, in forms which in vulgarity often leave nothing to be desired, then, if only very gradually, the results

of such visual instruction must ultimately become apparent in the children. The character they will inevitably assume if the quarrel takes the form of brutal attacks by the father against the mother, of drunken beatings, is hard for anyone who does not know this milieu to imagine. At the age of six the pitiable little boy suspects the existence of things which can fill even an adult with nothing but horror. . . . All the other things that the little fellow hears at home do not tend to increase his respect for his dear fellow men.

It ends badly if the man goes his own way from the very beginning and the woman, for the children's sake, opposes him. Then there is fighting and quarreling, and as the man grows estranged from his wife, he becomes more intimate with alcohol. When at length he comes home on Sunday or even Monday night, drunk and brutal, but always parted from his last cent, such scenes often occur that God have mercy!

I have seen this in hundreds of instances.

Although the deep and lasting damage it would have done to his dignity prevented Hitler from admitting the situation of the "let us assume, three-year-old boy" to be his own in the first-person account of *Mein Kampf*, the content of his description leaves no doubt whose childhood is meant.

A child whose father does not call to him by name but by whistling to him as though the child were a dog has the same disenfranchised and nameless status in the family as did "the Jew" in the Third Reich.

Through the agency of his unconscious repetition compulsion, Hitler actually succeeded in transferring the trauma of his family life onto the entire German nation. The introduction of the racial laws forced every citizen to trace his or her descent back to the third generation and to bear the ensuing consequences. At first, the wrong ancestry, or an uncertain one, meant disgrace and degradation; later it meant death—and this during peacetime, in a country that called itself civilized. There is no other example of such a phenomenon in all of history. The Inquisition, for example, persecuted the Jews because of their religion, but they were offered the chance to survive if they accepted baptism. In the Third Reich,

however, neither behavior nor merit nor achievement were of any avail; on the basis of descent alone a Jew was condemned, first to be demeaned and later to die. Is this not a twofold reflection of Hitler's fate?

1. It was impossible for Hitler's father, in spite of all his efforts, successes, and advances in career from shoemaker to chief customs inspector, to remove the "stain" in his past, just as it was later forbidden the Jews to remove the stigma of the yellow star they were forced to wear. The stain remained and oppressed Alois all his life. It may be that his frequent moves (eleven, according to Fest) had another cause beside a professional one—to obliterate his traces. This tendency is also very clear in Adolf's life. "When he was told in 1942 that there was a memorial marker in the village of Spital [in the region where his father was born] he went into one of his wild rages," Fest reports.

2. At the same time, the racial laws represented the repetition of the drama of Hitler's own childhood. In the same way that the Jew now had no chance to escape, the child Adolf at one time could not escape his father's blows, which were caused, not by the child's behavior, but by the father's unresolved problems, such as his resistance to mourning over his own childhood. It is fathers such as this who are likely to drag their sleeping child out of bed if they cannot come to terms with a mood (perhaps having just felt insignificant and insecure on some social occasion) and beat the child in order to restore their narcissistic equilibrium (cf. Christiane F.'s father).

The Jews fulfilled the same function in the Third Reich—which attempted to recover from the disgrace of the Weimar Republic at their expense—as this sleeping child. This was Adolf's function throughout his childhood; he had to accept the fact that at any moment a storm could break over his helpless head without his being able to find any way to avert or escape it.

Since there were no bonds of affection between Adolf and his father (it is significant that in *Mein Kampf* he refers to

Alois as "Herr Vater"), his burgeoning hatred was constant and unequivocal. It is different for children whose fathers have outbursts of rage and can then, in between times, play good-naturedly with their children. In this case the child's hatred cannot be cultivated in such a pure form. These children experience difficulties of another sort as adults; they seek out partners with a personality structure that, like their fathers', tends toward extremes. They are bound to these partners by a thousand chains and cannot bring themselves to leave them, always living with the hope that the other person's good side will finally win out; yet at every fresh outburst they are plunged into new despair. These sadomasochistic bonds, which go back to the equivocal and unpredictable nature of a parent, are stronger than a genuine love relationship; they are impossible to break, and signal permanent destruction of the self.

Little Adolf could be certain of receiving constant beatings; he knew that nothing he did would have any effect on the daily thrashings he was given. All he could do was deny the pain, in other words, deny himself and identify with the aggressor. No one could help him, not even his mother, for this would spell danger for her too, because she was also battered (cf. Toland).

This state of constant jeopardy is reflected very clearly in the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich. Let us try to imagine the following scene. A Jew is walking down the street, perhaps on his way home from buying milk, when a man wearing an SA armband attacks him; this man has the right to do anything to the Jew he wants, anything his fantasy happens to dictate and that his unconscious craves at the moment. The Jew can do nothing to alter this; he is in the same position as little Adolf once was. If the Jew tries to defend himself, there is nothing to prevent his being trampled to death. He is like the eleven-year-old Adolf, who in desperation once ran away from home with three friends, planning to float down the river on a homemade raft and thus flee from his violent father. Just for the very thought of trying to escape, he was nearly beaten to death (cf. Stierlin). It is just as impossible for the Jew to escape; all roads are cut off and lead to death, like the

This unconscious symbolic goal is of course a delusion, for the past can never be changed; yet every delusion has its own meaning, which is very easy to understand once the childhood situation is known. This meaning is frequently distorted by case histories and by information given us by biographers, who overlook precisely the most essential data because defense mechanisms are involved. For example, a great deal of research and writing has been done on the question of whether Alois Hitler's father was really Jewish and whether Alois could be called an alcoholic.

Often, however, the child's psychic reality has very little to do with what the biographers later "prove" to be facts. The mere *suspicion* of Jewish blood in the family is much more difficult for a child to bear than the certainty. Alois himself must have suffered from this uncertainty, and there can be little doubt that Adolf knew of the rumors even though no one wanted to speak openly about the matter. The very thing that parents try to hide is what will preoccupy a child the most, especially if a major parental trauma is involved (cf. page 166).

The persecution of the Jews "made it possible" for Hitler to "correct" his past on the level of fantasy. It permitted him:

1. To take *revenge* on his father, who was suspected of being half Jewish
2. To *liberate* his mother (Germany) from her persecutor
3. To *attain his mother's love* with fewer moral sanctions, with more true self-expression (the German people loved Hitler for being a shrieking Jew-hater, not for being the well-behaved Catholic boy he had to be for his mother)
4. To *reverse roles*—*he* has now become the dictator, *he* must now be obeyed and submitted to as his father once was; *he* organizes concentration camps in which people are treated the way he was as a child. (A person is not likely to conceive something monstrous if he does not know it somehow or other from experience. We simply tend to refuse to take a child's suffering seriously enough.)

5. Moreover, the persecution of the Jews permitted him to *persecute* the weak child in his own self that was now projected onto the victims. In this way he would not have to experience grief over his past pain, which had been especially hard to bear because his mother had not been able to prevent it. In this, as well as in his unconscious revenge on his early childhood persecutor, Hitler resembled a great number of Germans who had grown up in a similar situation.

In the portrait of Adolf Hitler's family as drawn by Stierlin, we still are shown the loving mother who, while she delegates the function of rescuer to her child, protects him at the same time from the violent father. In Freud's version of the Oedipus legend, we also find this beloved and loving idealized mother figure. In his book on male fantasies, Klaus Theweleit comes somewhat closer to the truth about these mothers, although he too hesitates to draw the logical consequences from his material. He ascertains that the image of a strict, punitive father and a devoted, protective mother keeps occurring in the cases he analyzes of representatives of Fascist ideology. The mother is referred to as "the best wife and mother in the world," as a "good angel," as "clever, of strong character, helpful, and deeply religious." The Fascists Theweleit analyzes admire qualities in the mothers of their comrades or in their mothers-in-law that they apparently do not want to attribute to their own mothers: severity, love of the fatherland, a Prussian attitude ("Germans do not cry")—the mother of iron who "doesn't bat an eyelash at the news of the death of her sons."

Theweleit quotes a case:

Still, it was not this news that turned out to be the last straw for the mother. Four sons were killed in the war; this she survived. It took something ridiculous in comparison to devastate her. The province of Lorraine became French and with it the company mines. [*Männerphantasien*]

But what if these two sides were two halves of one's own mother? Hermann Ehrhardt relates in the same book:

Once on a winter's night I stood sullenly outside in the snow for four hours before my mother finally said now I had been punished enough.

Before the mother "rescues" her son by saying he "had been punished enough," she sees to it that he stands in the snow for four hours. A child cannot understand why the mother he loves hurts him so, cannot comprehend why the woman who in his eyes is a giantess in actuality fears her husband as if she were a little girl and unconsciously passes on her own childhood humiliation to her little boy. A child cannot help but suffer from this harsh treatment. But he dare not live out this suffering or show it. There is no choice but to split it off and project it onto others, i.e., to ascribe his mother's harsh qualities to other mothers and even come to admire these qualities in them.

Could Klara Hitler help her son as long as she was herself her husband's dependent, submissive serving maid? While he was alive, she timidly called her husband "Uncle Alois," and after his death she would gesture toward his pipes, which were on display in the kitchen, to emphasize a point she was making.

What happens to a child when he must repeatedly see the same mother who tells him of her love, who carefully prepares his meals and sings lovely songs to him, turn into a pillar of salt and look on without lifting a finger when this child is given a brutal beating by his father? How must he feel when time after time he hopes in vain that she will help him, will come to his rescue; how must he feel when in his suffering he waits in vain for her finally to use her power, which in *his* eyes is so great, on his behalf? The mother watches her child being humiliated, derided, and tormented without coming to his defense, without doing anything to save him. Through her silence she is in complicity with his persecutor; she is abandoning her child. Can we expect a child to understand this? Should we be surprised if his bitterness, although repressed, is also directed against the mother? Perhaps this child will love his mother dearly on a conscious level; later, in his rela-

tionships with other people, he will repeatedly have the feeling of being abandoned, sacrificed, and betrayed.

Hitler's mother is surely no exception but rather the rule, if not even the ideal of many men. But can a mother who is only a slave give her child the respect he needs to develop his vitality? We can gather from the following depiction of the masses in *Mein Kampf* what Hitler's ideal of femininity was:

The psyche of the great masses is not receptive to anything that is halfhearted and weak.

Like a woman, whose psychic state is determined less by grounds of abstract reason than by an indefinable emotional longing for a force which will complement her nature, and who, consequently, would rather bow to a strong man than dominate a weakling, likewise the masses love a commander more than a petitioner and feel inwardly more satisfied by a doctrine, tolerating no other beside itself, than by the granting of liberalistic freedom with which, as a rule, they can do little, and are prone to feel that they have been abandoned. They are equally unaware of their shameless spiritual terrorization and the hideous abuse of their human freedom, for they absolutely fail to suspect the inner insanity of the whole doctrine. All they see is the ruthless force and brutality of its calculated manifestations, to which they always submit in the end.

In his description of the masses, Hitler accurately portrays his mother and her subservience. His political guidelines are based on very early experiences: brutality always wins out.

Hitler's scorn for women, understandable given his family background, was reinforced by the theories of Lanz von Liebenfels,

[whose] race theory was permeated by sexual-envy complexes and deep-seated antifemale emotions; woman, he maintained, had brought sin into the world, and her susceptibility to the lecherous wiles of bestial subhuman men was the chief cause for the infection of Nordic blood. [Fest, *Hitler*]

Perhaps Klara called her husband "Uncle Alois" out of sheer timidity, but whatever the reason, he found this ac-

ceptable. Did he even require it, just as he wished to be addressed by his neighbors with the formal "Sie," not the usual familiar "Du"? Even Adolf refers to him in *Mein Kampf* as "Herr Hitler," which possibly goes back to a wish of his father's that was introjected at a very early age. It is quite likely that by insisting on these forms of address Alois was attempting to compensate for the misery of his early childhood (being given away by his mother, illegitimate, poor, of dubious parentage) and finally perceive himself as *Herr*. From this conjecture it is only one step to the possibility that it was for this very reason that for twelve years the Germans had to greet one another with the salutation "Heil Hitler." All of Germany had to bow to even the most eccentric, entirely personal demands of its Führer, just as Klara and Adolf had once had to bow to their omnipotent master.

Hitler flattered the "German, Germanic" woman because he needed her homage, her vote, and her other services. He had also needed his mother, but he never had a chance to achieve a truly warm, intimate relationship with her. Stierlin writes:

N. Bromberg (1971) has written about Hitler's sexual habits: ". . . the only way in which he could get full sexual satisfaction was to watch a young woman as she squatted over his head and urinated or defecated in his face." He also reports ". . . an episode of erotogenic masochism involving a young German actress at whose feet Hitler threw himself, asking her to kick him. When she demurred, he pleaded with her to comply with his wish, heaping accusations on himself and groveling at her feet in such an agonizing manner that she finally acceded. When she kicked him, he became excited, and as she continued to kick him at his urging, he became increasingly excited. The difference in age between Hitler and the young women with whom he had any sexual involvement was usually close to the twenty-three-year difference between his parents."

It is totally inconceivable that a man who as a child received love and affection from his mother, which most Hitler biographers claim was the case, would have suffered from

these sadomasochistic compulsions, which point to a very early childhood disturbance. But our concept of mother love obviously has not yet wholly freed itself from the ideology of "poisonous pedagogy."

SUMMARY

Readers who interpret my treatment of Hitler's early childhood as sentimental or even as an attempt to excuse his deeds naturally have every right to construe what they have read as they see fit. People who, for example, had to learn at a very early age "to keep a stiff upper lip" identify with their parents to the extent that they consider any form of empathy with a child as emotionalism or sentimentality. As for the question of guilt, I chose Hitler for the very reason that I know of no other criminal who is responsible for the death of so many human beings. But nothing is gained by using the word *guilt*. We of course have the right and the duty to lock up murderers who threaten our life. For the time being, we do not know of any better solution. But this does not alter the fact that the need to commit murder is the outcome of a tragic childhood and that imprisonment is the tragic sequel to this fate.

If we stop looking for new facts and focus on the significance within the total picture of what we already know, we will come upon sources of information in our study of Hitler that have thus far not been properly evaluated and therefore are not readily or widely accessible. As far as I know, for example, little attention has been paid to the important fact that Klara Hitler's hunchbacked and schizophrenic sister, Adolf's Aunt Johanna, lived with the family throughout his childhood. At least in the biographies I have read, I have never found a connection made between this fact and the Third Reich's euthanasia law. To find any significance in this connection, a person must be able and willing to comprehend the

feelings that arise in a child who is exposed daily to an extremely absurd and frightening form of behavior and yet at the same time is forbidden to articulate his fear and rage or his questions. Even the presence of a schizophrenic aunt can be positively dealt with by a child, but only if he can communicate freely with his parents on the emotional level and can talk with them about his fears.

Franziska Hörl, a servant in the Hitler household when Adolf was born, told Jetzinger in an interview that she had not been able to put up with this aunt any longer and left the family on her account, stating simply that she refused to be around "that crazy hunchback" any longer.

The child of the family is not allowed to say such a thing. Unable to leave, he must put up with everything; not until he has grown up can he take any action. When Hitler was grown and came to power, he was finally able to avenge himself a thousandfold on this unfortunate aunt for his own misfortune. He had all the mentally ill in Germany put to death, because he felt they were "useless" for a "healthy" society (i.e., for him as a child). As an adult, Hitler no longer had to put up with anything; he was even able to "liberate" all of Germany from the "plague" of the mentally ill and retarded and was not at a loss to find ideological embellishments for this thoroughly personal act of revenge.

I have not gone into the background of the euthanasia law in this book because it has been my main concern to describe the consequences of actively humiliating a child, by presenting a striking example. Since such humiliation, combined with prohibiting a child's verbal expression, is a constant and universally encountered factor in child-rearing, the influence of this factor in the child's later development is easily overlooked. The claim that child beating (including spanking) is common, to say nothing of the conviction that it is necessary in order to spur the child on to learn, completely ignores the dimensions of childhood tragedy. Because the relationship of child beating to subsequent criminality is not perceived, the world reacts with horror to the crimes it sees

committed and overlooks the conditions giving rise to them, as if murderers fell out of a clear blue sky.

I have used Hitler as an example to show that:

1. Even the worst criminal of all time was not born a criminal.

2. Empathizing with a child's unhappy beginnings does not imply exoneration of the cruel acts he later commits. (This is as true for Alois Hitler as it is for Adolf.)

3. Those who persecute others are warding off knowledge of their own fate as victims.

4. Consciously experiencing one's own victimization instead of trying to ward it off provides a protection against sadism; i.e., the compulsion to torment and humiliate others.

5. The admonition to spare one's parents inherent in the Fourth Commandment and in "poisonous pedagogy" encourages us to overlook crucial factors in a person's early childhood and later development.

6. We as adults don't get anywhere with accusations, indignation, or guilt feelings, but only by understanding the situations in question.

7. True emotional understanding has nothing to do with cheap sentimental pity.

8. The fact that a situation is ubiquitous does not absolve us from examining it. On the contrary, we must examine it for the very reason that it is or can be the fate of each and every one of us.

9. Living out hatred is the opposite of experiencing it. To experience something is an intrapsychic reality; to live it out, on the other hand, is an action that can cost other people their lives. If the path to experiencing one's feelings is blocked by the prohibitions of "poisonous pedagogy" or by the needs of the parents, then these feelings will have to be lived out. This can occur either in a destructive form, as in Hitler's case, or in a self-destructive one, as in Christiane F.'s. Or, as in the case of most criminals who end up in prison, this living out can lead to the destruction both of the self and of others. The history of Jürgen Bartsch, which I shall treat in the next chapter, is a dramatic example of this.