

On Trust, Good, and Evil

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with a basic concept informing the work of Elliott Jaques: trust which is the social glue that binds people together and has consequences for all social domains. The etymological origins of “trust” connect with major normative concepts, including truth and relying upon others. These are vitally connected with the psychoanalytic approaches of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein as well as the nature of requisite and anti-requisite practices throughout society. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Trust is the main ingredient of the social glue that holds people together. It is the criterion by which we ought to judge whether behavior is good, normal, reasonable, moral, ethical, or whether it is bad, abnormal, unreasonable, immoral, and unethical. It is the best point of focus for its etymologically close relatives and bastions of the good society – liberty, freedom, justice, truth, faith, and confidence.

TRUST AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

The etymological connections are telling.* The terms are all related around the common idea of people in union being able to rely upon each other as in the extended family and wedlock. “To rely upon” in itself comes the Latin *re-ligare*, to bind again. Trust, and its sibling, truth, are rooted in the old German *trystan*, which gives us *tryst* and *troth* and *betrothal* and *wedlock*. Freedom derives from the Indo-Germanic root PREI, which refers to love in the sense of loving

*Most of the etymological sources are from W W Skeat. *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (third edition). Oxford: University Press, 1909.

kinsman. Liberty is similar to freedom via the Indo-Germanic root LEUBH, which has the same meaning as PREI. Justice in its turn takes us also to the togetherness notion, deriving as it does from the Latin *iungere*, meaning to join together. Here we also get *jury*, which gives fairness, in contrast to *injury*, which harms and breaks apart. Finally, faith, as contained also in *confidence*, comes from the Indo-Germanic root BEIDH, an abode, and kinship. We end up again in the kinsmen joined together at home!

So here we have the innermost meanings of some of the central concepts of political democracy associated with each other around the common theme of being joined and bound together in the kind of union that should exist among the members of the same family. It is the expression of the feeling that somehow the good society should exhibit the primary values that hold the good family together – not just love, but mutual trust, the notion that no member would harm any other, and the awareness that if all are to live together in the same abode, then each must be able to trust and rely upon each and every other, secure in being able to rely upon the mutual love and trust of the betrothed – the parents – who, like the sun, should be the core around which all else revolves.

A family whose members cannot and do not trust each other, whose members would lie to each other, or do injury to each other, whose parental figures are not truly and reliably betrothed, turns an abode into a social nightmare. Family members do not necessarily all have to love each other. But, regardless of unevenness in love among them, trust must be ensured. Suspicion and mistrust are death to a family. They are deadly to all social relationships.

There is a major assumption underlying all the foregoing, an assumption of which I am aware, and which I take as my absolute starting point, my basic tenet, that which lies at the heart of the meaning of the social good, the good society. Let me make that assumption explicit. The assumption is that when all else is said and done what human societies will hold to be good is anything and everything that enhances the possibilities of survival not of individuals but of the species, and not only of the survival of the species but of its adaptation into the far forward reaches of time.

This assumption about species adaptation enables us to proceed immediately and directly to a definition of good behavior and a good person, readily translated into a solid definition of that otherwise very elusive concept normality – normal behavior and a normal person: this definition is that normal or good persons displaying good or normal behavior, are persons who collaborate with others in such a way as to enhance society's ability to carry out its species survival and adaptation work, such as reproduction and family rearing, economic production, government, education, law, and policing (Miller and Jaques, 1988). Neurotic, psychotic, and criminal behaviors are those which disrupt the carrying out of society's essential functions; and people who cannot control themselves from behaving in such ways tend to get labeled as neurotic, or psychotic, or criminal, or abnormal.

This definition of normality fits readily into a primitive extended family society. Everyone is expected and relied upon to take part in the work of the family – in the full sense of the being bound together, of *religare*. This binding together takes place within established family mores, whose binding comes from the biological mother ties of infancy, as in all social animals.

The primal significance of trust versus suspicion in the goodness of normality of human relationships is strongly supported by the psychoanalytical theories of Melanie Klein, who has delved most deeply into the primitive layers of the human mind. Her clinical work with small children led her to describe the first six months of life in terms of the infant's struggles through what she termed the paranoid–schizoid position. In this phase, the infant's most engrossing psychological task is to deal with powerful primitive persecutory (paranoid) anxiety, the consequence of the infant's difficulties in coping with primal envy and destructive impulses. It is only in the second half of the first year, given sufficient working through of the paranoid–schizoid phenomena, that issues of love, hate, guilt, and reparation come to the fore in their own right in what Mrs Klein has called the “depressive position.” In short, trust and suspicion (and profiducial and paranoiagenic processes) underlie love and hate in human social development.

As soon as one leaves the family setting, however, the picture becomes more complex. How are freedom, justice, liberty, and trust to be maintained when people no longer know each other, when the anonymity of large urban populations and of vastly spread out rural populations takes over? How can you trust millions of people who you will never see, and most certainly will never know? The answer has been developed over 3000 years of civilization and lies in the formulation and establishment of the laws that govern society. That much is clear.

TRUST AND THE LAW

What has always been less clear, however, is the question of how liberty and freedom can be made to square with, accord with, harmonize with the rules, regulations, and laws that seem to constrain and seem therefore to negate freedom and liberty. The common view, descended from the gross individualism of Hobbes, James, and John Stuart Mill, is to have as few laws as possible. This answer begs the questions in a very serious way. For it is to accept the negativistic view that laws are inherently opposed to freedom and liberty. Etymology, the wisdom of the ages that gets built into our language, tells us differently, and I think that etymology has the right answer. The essence – of liberty, freedom and justice – in the good society lies not in the degree of untrammelled and unimpeded right of each individual to do as he or she might please, but rather in the quality of the binding that holds them together.

Human beings are social animals. They do not, and cannot, live in total isolation. Even the role of hermit is a social role, for there is a big difference

between living in solitude within a social sphere, and disappearing altogether from all society. The latter is not to be a hermit. And to be able to live together, people must be able to trust each other. I would therefore define liberty and freedom as having to do with living under conditions where people can trust each other, working in concert with each other in providing for species survival and adaptation, with the opportunity to withdraw into musing and reverie, and private personal life, and sleep as occasion arises – and always within the law.

Even the terms “law” and “good” carry these social connotations: *law* from the Greek *legein* – to collect (closely related to the *re-ligare* above, of relying and *relegein*) and *good* from fellowship. Trust comes in by providing the basic criterion for judging whether our values as expressed in our laws, rules, regulations, social processes and procedures, established customs and practices, and standards of behavior are good, bad, or indifferent. They are good (producing trust) if they can be seen to enhance and to increase the trust available in the world; they are bad or paranoiagenic (producing suspicion or mistrust) if they contribute to a weakening and decreasing of the trust available; they are irrelevant if they do neither.

Thus, for example, good laws are simply laws which bind society together; but bad laws are divisive. Binding together means binding everyone together, and not the binding together of special groups. There will, of course, be disagreements over particular issues, but these should be disagreements as between aggregates of free individuals, with the majority will prevailing. They should not be founded upon the continual favoring of particular groups or categories within society – such as religious, or gender, or economic class, or color, or ethnic background – for that is to divide a society. Such divisions reduce and weaken trust within a society, even among favored categories, for majority groups cannot treat other groups unfairly without generating concern among them, and without generating that deeper-lying anxiety among their own members which, in turn, stirs underlying unease with respect to how far you can trust your own kind in the long run.

THE MYTH OF FREEDOM IN ORGANIZATIONS

Some of these features are readily observable in the intermediate institutions in our society. Our employment hierarchical organizations are outstanding in this regard. There are innumerable examples of paranoiagenic procedures and practices that are having a seriously debilitating effect on society. One such example is that of the universally unfortunate compensation procedures that can in no way give the feeling that fairness is being achieved in differential pay distribution. And, since the pattern of these differentials in wage and salary distribution is the major determinant of the distribution of differential economic status for families in industrially developed nations, widespread feelings of differential inequity are decidedly paranoiagenic. There can be little doubt that our wage and salary systems fail to contribute what they ought to

contribute to employees working effectively together to help to pursue the work of the enterprise or to good feelings about our society. More requisite systems could have a marked trust-inducing impact upon industrial nations.

In the same manner, social processes that fail to sustain abundant employment, organizational structures that undermine the achievement of effective managerial leadership, unclear accountabilities, and authorities that pitch people against each other in what seem to be clashes of personalities, difficulties in matching individuals to roles, and employing people at full level of potential capability all have paranoiac consequences.

Anti-requisite practices such as those illustrated cause individuals to feel burdened and fettered lacking in freedom and prey to injustice. They complain about bureaucracy, and readily develop the idea that it is a social organization itself that causes the trouble. Something called "less organization" comes to be seen as a good thing itself. Thus there is a widespread cry, orchestrated by academic gurus, for an end to the managerial hierarchy, for boundariless organizations, for organic structures, for adhocracy, for replacing organization by information. In short, greater freedom is believed to lie in freedom from organization.

But true liberty and freedom lie in the creation not of less organization, but of trust-inducing organization. I have had the opportunity, for example, in help to introduce more requisite institutions into managerial hierarchical organizations, and to witness the effects. With a clarification and clear specification of managerial accountability, authority, and layering in the hierarchical structure, the result is not the feared mechanistic rigidity, but rather a sense of freedom and release. And the same holds for changes in the compensation system and in the accurate defining of working relationships. Organizational clarification and the move toward increasingly requisite practices is not experienced as a threat to freedom and liberty. On the contrary, the clear articulation and teaching of requisite organization is experienced as giving increased flexibility, increased freedom and liberty, lessened bureaucracy, greater justice, and fairness.

LIMITS AND TRUST

In short then, organizational limits and constraints that enable people to be able to trust each other and to rely upon each other's collaboration regardless of the vast range of differences in personalities, are experienced as liberating rather than as repressive. We are looking for circumstances in which we can rely upon what everyone does, to be within a social space that allows everyone to get on with what they want to do, in a manner that makes it possible for us to collaborate in common endeavors. Sound organizational limits act not as constraints in the burdensome sense, but rather as the context whose very existence allows for the genuine freedom that comes from a reliable social field that can be known and understood. Such freedom is reassuring in the same way that the knowledge that drivers will stay on the correct side of the road

provides the clearly limited and therefore valuable freedom to drive with assurance on one's own side.

My argument therefore, is that true freedom, liberty, and justice are the product of social constraints or limits. But not just of any old social constraint: only requisite constraints will do. And what does requisite constraint mean? It means accepted: accepted constraints that enable people to trust each other, to rely upon each other to behave in reasonable, normal, ethical, moral ways; or, in other words, constraints that increase the amount of trust in the world by its ability to adapt. Nature seems to have seen fit to provide a plentiful supply of such unwitting constructive forces within us. These constructive forces can be disrupted, however, and equally destructive forces unleashed by paranoiagenic institutions and constraints. In the end, the limits of the control of the extended family, depend upon the trust or the mistrust generated by the nature of the institutional settings we learn to construct and to maintain. Freedom, liberty, justice, faith, truth, all refer to circumstances in which far from being our own free selves, we feel ensconced in a society whose constraints give us the feeling of being together with all others in a setting of mutual trust and constructive common endeavor akin to the deep-lying trust of true kinship.

WHERE DOES EVIL COME FROM?

There is, however, a very serious gap or question that remains in our analysis. We have defined anti-requisite constraints and organizations as those which are paranoiagenic. And we have pointed out that paranoiagenic circumstances can release destructive antisocial behaviors, and indeed sometimes require such behavior, as, for example, in greedily seeking one's own good without regard for others, vindictive or spiteful envy, deceitful manipulation of others, or the unjust exercise of power. But the question remains, where does this type of behavior come from? If it can be released, it must be present somewhere in order to be released. And what happens to it under requisite social circumstances – does it go away, does it go underground, does it evaporate, where is it?

These questions about where these destructive impulses are located, lead on to an even more basic question; namely, where did they come from in the first place? For if we could ascertain where they came from, we might be able better to understand how they are stored, how they become released, and how they are kept under control. And we might also learn whether they ever had a function in their own right and/or are merely degraded or degenerated leftovers, the remnants, of what may have been more constructive or essential processes.

It is around these questions that Freud's theory of the life and death instincts, and theories of original sin, come together. Under the heading of the death instinct, Freud posited the existence, alongside constructive life and loving impulses, of innate destructive, hate – not just of aggression, which be recognized as an essential component of all constructive behavior – but of hostile impulses directed towards self-destruction and the destruction of others.

Melanie Klein was one of the few analysts who took seriously this fundamental dual instinct postulate of Freud's. She teased out further the idea of the primal innate destructiveness in terms not only of primal hostility, but of primal envy which seeks to destroy the good object because it is so good, and of primal greed, in which gratification serves only to fire further desire which can never be satisfied. In her formulation, it is these destructive phenomena that are at their zenith in the first six months of life, a period in which the infant's central emotional task is to cope somehow with these impulses, and to survive alongside a good breast and a good mother and other good objects which have also remained intact and alive.

It is these postulates elaborated in the *sturm und drang*, as of the infant, that are so reminiscent of the idea of original sin, especially as expressed in the seven deadly sins – rage, envy, gluttony (greed), lust, sloth, pride, and avarice.

This curious conjunction of modern psychoanalytical thought with age-old conceptions of the roots of good and evil, and of original sin, are suggestive of the possibility that the paranoiogenic behaviors that are destructive or sinful in adulthood might have had a constructive function in infancy. The idea that this hypothesis may not be so unreasonable is supported by the following line of thought.

The survival of the infant during the first six months of life requires that it should operate on the assumption (stated in adult terminology) that it must go after whatever it requires to satisfy its physiological needs in such a way as to seek to achieve full and immediate gratification, without frustration, and without any regard whatever for the needs or interest of others, including any litter mates, feeding breasts, or caring mothers or fathers, or whoever or whatever might be the source of gratification. In the mammalian kingdom in which multiple births are, or had been, the natural order of things, anything less than this unmitigated total physiological self-gratification would threaten the life of the infant. Survival against the competition of other members of the litter would go to the strongest and the selfish, while selflessness and consideration for others would be a deadly weakness in the survival stakes.

Under such conditions of threat to one's continued physical existence behaviors that are regarded as evil or destructive in adult life may be seen to be constructively necessary in early infancy. You must attack the breast that feeds you, and attack it with the energizing sense of hate if it frustrates in any way. Feces and urine become objects of hate if they cause discomfort and cannot be eliminated immediately. The good breast must be envied and attacked spitefully for being good, because if you love it you will be considerate and protective towards it, and will not feed in the lustful narcissistic manner that befits a surviving infant mammal.

During this period it is crucial that all the mechanics of the paranoid-schizoid position come into play, particularly splitting and projective identification, so that the infant does not have to be encumbered by the uncertainties of ambivalence, guilt, and reparation. The cost is the continued experience of

paranoid anxiety in relation to the attacked and, narcissistically, used part object that becomes persecuting in its bad split-off aspect. But the splitting also enables the infant to survive with its good idealized split-off part objects and the good parts of itself, that will enable it with its maturing physiological and mental development to move into the depressive position.

With the maturation into the depressive position at roughly six months of age, as Mrs Klein places it, and progress through this position, the infant achieves the ability to mitigate hate by love, to tolerate ambivalence, to cope with the resulting feelings of guilt, and to undertake the work of separation. It is precisely at this stage, that the processes that were essential for survival through the paranoid–schizoid position during the first six months, begin to take on their coloring of bad, evil, sin, destructiveness. But, nevertheless, they are necessary for early survival, they are now established for life. And it becomes part of the nature of ensuing childhood, through adulthood and old age, unto death, that the individual must maintain the continual re-working through of the unresolved paranoid–schizoid conflicts and infantile processes associated with the operation of the primal psychic processes necessary for primitive survival but now regarded as evil. Any failure of this continued working through process manifests itself in antisocial behavior or in psychopathology variously referred to as bad, immoral, unethical, unlawful, or as psychologically abnormal or sick.

It is at this point in our argument that the significant part played by our social institutions in our behavior may become more evident. To the extent that our social arrangements support trust in social interactions, they also support the effective continual working through and control of the paranoid–schizoid processes. They do so because of the impact of reality testing, which is on the side of the enhancement of trust and the reduction of paranoid–schizoid anxieties.

By the same token, to the extent that our social arrangements are themselves anti-requisite and the source of dissatisfaction, injustice, conflict, and mistrust, they reinforce the primitive paranoid–schizoid processes and lead to their regressive expression. For anti-requisite institutions, by their very nature, reward the expression of greedy selfishness, fired by spite and envy, and operating with manipulative exploitation of others. They thus undermine good, considerate, moral, and honest behavior, with the increased release of antisocial and psycho-pathological behaviors. These behaviors result from the failure to mitigate and control the remnants of the primal psychological processes that were so necessary for infant survival, but any continuation of whose expression from later infancy to adulthood have been transformed from good into bad, from necessity to evil.

REFERENCE

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