Social Change Versus Perceived Villainy

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The quest for genuine social change has been hampered and distorted by non-rational perceptions of villainy as destructive scheming by perennial evildoers—a villainy perceived as the root of all social evils—and by corresponding perceptions of scapegoats who are believed to carry out these schemes on the practical level. These perceptions are traced through a variety of approaches including history, religion, art, politics, economics, environment problems, race relations, and development needs. The roots of the villain-versus-savior syndrome have been closely related to destructive aggression and violence in the contemporary world. The essay closes with a discussion of the outlook for perceived villainy and for the remaining counterforces.

Why do violent persons and groups in our period disdain the use of available free institutions and rational thinking in order to pursue their aims? Could it be that hatred toward perceived villains—a concept to be defined shortly—is widespread and effective in *all* types of contemporary societies? This is the subject of the present essay. After two introductory sections this subject will be traced through various spheres of life and academic disciplines in order to reach some tentative conclusions.

Tolerance and Its Impediments

Human beings with rational minds, who live in a free society, are characterized by a readiness to listen and to engage in a constant exchange of views regarding social and cultural life. This exchange inevitably involves the opposition of divergent opinions; but this opposition may be rooted in well-considered thought—along with a tolerant, understanding attitude toward opposing views no matter how absurd or repugnant they may appear. In fact, earlier generations were basically unable to believe that there was any evil which patient persuasion could not cure, and dwindling residual beliefs of this kind have survived into our period.

However, our belief in tolerance and persuasion faces a widespread propensity of human beings for self-deception, along with a strong inclination—both on the individual and the collective levels—to blame *others* for all the existing or imagined evils in society.

Villains and Scapegoats

The result has been a continuous search for villains, that is, wicked evil-doers who by their very nature—not merely as a result of an honest diver-gence of well-considered opinions—supposedly keep scheming for the des-truction of all their opponents, if not society as a whole. One might distinguish here between the selection of a single overriding villain and the perception of "multiple villainy." The Ku Klux Klan, for instance, has peopled its world with *many* villains: Catholics, Jews, foreigners, and, of course, blacks. Admittedly the difference between the two varieties is relative.

It is also possible to differentiate between types of perceived villainy: First, an "old-fashioned" type in which people have primarily been intolerant of *The Alien* simply on account of his/her being alien; for the provincial mind the alien has served as a convenient place to dump hostilities and blame. Channelling negative feelings "outward" has preserved the cohesiveness of the group. Examples of this attitude can be found in some African societies which actually institutionalize the villainous scapegoat: They cast the stranger in the ritual role of a carrier of antagonistic forces that require exorcism (Bozeman, 1976). This attitude may also be at the root of modern movements to exorcise the "strange" Western education and religion as the villain of our times.

Second, there is a newer type of "Promethean" villainy; apparently it derives from a delusion of omnipotence. In this case, a group feels that it should be able to accomplish great things, and when it cannot do so (install a new social order, for instance) then it assumes that some other group, used as scapegoat, is thwarting attainment of an otherwise realistic objective. Old-fashioned villain hunting is compatible with fatalism while the newer type, in a sense, is the product of a voluntarist rejection of fatalism.

The abstract villain serves on the practical level as a convenient *scapegoat* for anything that goes wrong in actual life. The scapegoat then symbolizes "the evil" as such. Most scapegoating, it is true, looks rational to the people engaged in it; they believe that their actions and intentions will yield the expected results and cannot conceivably lead to opposite outcomes. One might also argue that their actions may appear irrational only *ex post*.

For revolutionary, or even for reformist movements, perceptions of vil-lainy may be indispensable in order to arouse the emotions required to generate changes that are objectively necessary, and then to endure these changes in practice. Undoubtedly, many African blacks, for instance, see whites as villains; yet, this does not alter the obvious fact of actual white oppression in South Africa. On the other hand, the continuous search for villains is frequently manipulated, i.e., stimulated and spread by groups aspiring to acquire or maintain social power.

If villain hunting, though basically irrational, may at times serve an intellig-

ible objective purpose, the conversion of this abstract hunt into concrete scapegoating easily becomes a device to deflect attention from actual evils and shortcomings in society to imaginary ones. Despite the conceptual differences between the two, the villain and the scapegoat fulfill somewhat similar purposes: enhancing one's own image, alleviating anxiety or a sense of culpability, protecting oneself against the need for individual or collective scrutiny, releasing aggression in a socially feasible way, or simply repressing unpleasant facts. Although these mechanisms sometimes overlap with respect to the villain perceived and the scapegoat used, they serve different social functions: the villain can potentially, at least, serve an active idealism; the scapegoat deflects attention and action from the real shortcomings in social life.

The Impact of Irrationality

When no real villains can be located—even though there sometimes *are* real evildoers—some individuals will ingeniously invent imaginary ones. This frantic search for villains expresses conspicuously the deeply rooted impediments in human consciousness toward the adoption of a rational view of social happenings.

In what sense *can* human beings be rational and what does rationality imply? I have no desire to add to the many definitions of rationality which can be found in psychology, economics, sociology, or philosophy. The *American Oxford Dictionary* associates the term *rational* with "able to reason, sensible, sane, moderate, not foolish or absurd or extreme, of or based on reasoning, rejecting what is unreasonable or cannot be tested by reason in religion or custom." Some other elements of rationality might be listed: acting in a manner which is not likely to achieve the opposite results from those intended on the conscious level; or simply not acting in an erratic, unsystematic, fluctuating, unforeseeable, or contradictory way. This includes those actions and attitudes that are rooted in uncontrollable mistrust and hatred or, for that matter, uncritical affection towards others.

In this process, collective irrationality—that is, the kind that seizes a social entity such as a national, ethnic, linguistic, or religious group—is more harmful than individual irrationality. Collective irrationality is typically focused on an image or *Feindbild* of collective villains who bring about any conceivable kind of evil: intellectual, political, or technological (Hoffer, 1951). These images are far in excess of the existence of objectively recognizable and provable evildoers on both the collective and individual level (Delarue, 1964). In each case the perceived villain will rightly or wrongly tend to assume his or her complete innocence. Beyond this interplay, however, it is society's indomitable *need* for villainous scapegoats which characterizes the frequently irrational attitudes and actions of persons and groups. The various manners in which this constant search—for specific scapegoats and the more

general villains—can express itself will be presently enumerated one by one, though they often overlap in practice.

The Villain in History

Not unlike the malcontents of the day, subsequent historians have tended, more often unconsciously than otherwise, to explain unfortunate happenings, years if not centuries later, as the effect either of one perennial villain *or* of various evildoers. This tendency has been discussed too often to require an extensive account here even if space permitted. Edward Gibbon, for instance, selected and discussed a number of villains in history, including Christianity (Gibbon, 1909-1913). The mutual assignment of blame for imperialism or for the first World War, and the various conspiracy or stab-in-the-back myths might also serve as examples of displaced villainy—there are, of course, many more (Gerschenkron, 1968; Loewenberg, 1972).

Depending on the occasion, the perceived villains represented were external aggressors who subjugated an entire tribe or nation concerned; internal oppressors who applied the same procedure to certain strata of their own society; a military elite which established its rule over the civilian majority to the prevention of any legitimate alternative; foreign imperialists who penetrated a country militarily or politically in order to convert it into an outlet for their own products or investments, or else who first permeated it economically and then established political domination on this basis; or colonialists who misdirected the resources and the development of a given area in the interest of their own raw material supply and high profits.

It would be hopeless for anyone to deny that all these things *have* occurred in history repeatedly. What matters, however, is the general inference that the villain hunters typically derive from a single happening, along with their tendency to overlook *other* factors that may have contributed decisively to the backwardness, poverty, or hopelessness of the various population groups exploited. For example, there has been the perennial anti-Chilean scapegoating by Bolivians who have blamed so many of their own problems on the war-induced lack of a seaport. During the initial phase of Spanish colonialism, the relative ease of the colonization of Mexico by the Spaniards was a result not only of their admittedly brutal methods of conquest but also of the ancient religious beliefs of the Aztecs, the highly stratified and oppressive structure of the Aztec society, the animosity of the victims of Montezuma or other overlords, and also, perhaps, the devastating effects of frequent earthquakes. In Peru, the Spanish conquest was facilitated by the internal struggle going on within the Inca realm at the time.

Conversely, the later demise of the Spanish empire was a result in part, at least, of its single-minded greed for precious metals and its failure to replace

the disintegrating feudal structure with a more viable, industrial base (Glade, 1969). The survival of a still medieval church during the processes of colonization, followed by subsequent decolonization, constituted an additional factor in Spain's demise, partly through the permeating religious impact upon the subjected populations and partly through the protection of these populations from complete extinction by the worldly conquerors.

Each of these factors *can*, of course, also be formulated in terms of someone's villainy—by persons or groups whose own psychic needs do not permit them to see other alternatives. In so doing, they erect barriers to their own understanding of other influences and processes that have contributed to the objective situation under scrutiny.

The Villain in Religion

In some religions, a specific kind of villain serves as an indispensable device for demarcation toward competing creeds. The various demons and satans are seen as fallen angels, as creatures of nature itself or else as a divine method of testing humankind. In all cases villains must be either exorcised by prayers or placated by sacrificial rites. For the purposes of this discussion, however, such superhuman villains are of less interest than the human variety. The latter type includes, above all, heretics who are an essential ingredient of any organized creed. We shall see later that this applies to many non-religious creeds as well.

The heretic, doubter, or cynic, it is true, is frequently seen as a superhuman kind of devil or as a victim of obsession. The religious reformer is only slightly less suspect; this individual also puts in doubt the established doctrine and its timeless validity. Such a leader endeavors to change existing doctrine or contrasts independent thinking with authoritarian dogma, thus undermining the unquestioning acceptance of the dogma by the faithful (Braunthal, 1979). The worst villain of all, of course, is the atheist—the agnostic is not deemed much better—who virtually invites the wrath of Heaven upon the entire community concerned, perhaps even upon the whole of humankind. The atheist or agnostic is thus readily blamed for any evils which an offended deity may have imposed on the community.

Special considerations apply to those religions that aspire to embrace all of humankind sooner or later, to convert or conquer the doubters, to displace all the other religions and, with them, to do away with their respective satans; in short, to persuade or subdue everybody who has not seen "the light," thus pleasing Heaven and fulfilling its will. Islam offers an outstanding example of this long-range aspiration. This is one reason why in Lebanon, Moslem Arabs, including various Palestinian and Syrian groups, have seriously threatened the Christian-Arab nonbelievers who in turn have fought each other but have also sought and received Israeli support. What perfect opportunities arise in all

such cases to look for villains or scapegoats and, of course, to find them—thus "explaining" war, oppression, and the like.

The Villain in Music

One can point out the impressive presentation of evil, especially treachery, in the various masses, requiems and passions, present, for example, in Bach's magnificent St. Matthew's Passion and cantatas; however, there is one kind of music in which the villain—usually enacted by a bass, baritone or contralto, rarely by a tenor or soprano—provides the essence and spice of the story.

I am, of course, referring to opera. What would opera be without Scarpia, Iago, Pizarro, Alberich, Hagen, Klingsor, Kaspar, Mephisto, Dapertutto, Sparafucile, Count Luna, the Grand Inquisitor, Macbeth, Azucena, Dalila, Klytemnestra, Herodias, or the Nurse in "Die Frau ohne Schatten"? All these invariably deep-voiced evildoers symbolize the basic need of opera fans for the appearance of villains on whom the tragic outcome of the story can be blamed. This corresponds essentially to the way that tragedy in the real lives of persons and nations is typically "explained" by villain hunters.

It could be argued that both the librettist and the composer felt impelled in each case to simplify for the audience certain psychic needs of its own which it could otherwise not readily understand or express. At times villainy has certainly served as a theatrical device to provide greater tension to the plot through intrigue or violence. However, opera could not have survived without catering to the real urge of many individuals to identify villains and, if possible, to see them perish.

Admittedly all through the history of drama, well beyond its somewhat unsophisticated form of opera, the villain has been a necessary part of the plot; an aspect of the story to be overcome by the hero or heroine, thereby unifying the audience in its revulsion against the villain. There have been some exceptions to this pattern, for example, in the Greek tragedy where "Fate" was the opponent of the hero and could not very well be hated, but only feared, while the hero was pitied; or in some versions of modern drama where the villain is devillainized through psychological understanding which makes him/her appear explainable and possibly excusable.

In our own period there have been even more crucial instances of perceived villainy in art: Hitler's decrying of "degenerate" art forms; the Soviet Union's scapegoating of modern, non-representational painting; the Maoist suppression of Beethoven; and the widespread nationalistic hostility in various parts of the world against supposedly corrosive "alien" or "cosmopolitan" influences in almost any form of art.

The Villain in Politics

The villain in politics is a close, though usually a disguised relative, of the villain in religion. Each political ideology builds up its own image of villains, some of whom recognizably resemble reality by coincidence, at least, while others are quite distinct from it without being less lively. This distinction admittedly pertains more clearly to primitive than to sophisticated approaches to politics, and it applies more distinctly to politics since the first World War than it applied to late nineteenth-century politics.

For old-line *liberals*, in the nineteenth-century sense, "The State" serves as all-round villain. In this attitude, they differ only slightly from that of the anarchists from the past and certain quasi-anarchist protesters from the last few decades (Horowitz, 1964). There is in fact a small political grouping in the United States today called The Libertarian Party, which almost seems to represent a coalition of old-line liberals and New Left neo-anarchists.

The old-line liberal creed confines The State, at best, to the role of a nightwatchman or to the establishment and maintenance of a suitable framework for private initiative and individual enterprise, along with freedom in general. Tariffs and other impediments to free trade, labor unions, public ownership of enterprises, social legislation and labor laws, many taxes— though not many subsidies to business—are all seen as being mistaken, egotistic, or in extreme cases as belonging to the realm of villainy.

During the last few decades, it is true, the latter-day variety of laissez-faire liberalism, which paradoxically likes to characterize itself as social market economy, has grudgingly accepted some of the policies mentioned, for example, social security. It also approves of protection against "unfair" competition from abroad along with state subsidies to endangered firms and entire industries. Even some public enterprises are accepted as *fait accompli* until such time as their denationalization may become feasible, and some environmental controls are hesitatingly tolerated. But the basic mistrust toward The State always remains, and any adversities befalling private business are blamed, not on its own shortcomings, but on The State (Lauterbach, 1959).

Conservatives in Europe, on the other hand, used to regard liberalism as the principal villain insofar as liberalism questioned the authority of the ruling groups, feudal privileges, the leading role of the military in society, and the docile duties of the underdog. With the rise of socialist movements and the demise of old-line political liberalism, however, conservatism changed the principal target of its villain image. This has been true particularly of Great Britain, while American conservatism has had an anti-centralist focus almost from the outset (Rossiter, 1962).

At any rate, conservatives today tend to blame The State for most evils just

as laissez-faire liberals used to do. Monetarism in its various incarnations ranging from Margaret Thatcher's approaches to those of Ronald Reagan, Milton Friedman or the International Monetary Fund characterizes neo-conservatism in its strange alliance with revived nineteenth-century liberalism; skillful money management is expected to reduce the economic role of the villainous State.

Neo-conservatives even see democratic socialism—which they seldom are able to distinguish clearly from Bolshevism (Harrington, 1973)—as the embodiment of state intervention and thus as the number one villain of our time. Other conservatives, along with voices from some different directions, put the chief emphasis on the supposed laziness of people, on their lack of morality, or on the perceived absence of effective authority in the family.

Socialists, for their part, tend to blame capitalism for all the evils in society and culture. They rarely pay sufficient attention to the sweeping changes that have occurred during the last century in the actual socio-economic institutions of the West, particularly the respective roles of private and public enterprise, and to the new trends in technology and managerial organization (Schumpeter, 1950; Shonfield, 1965). "Capitalism" frequently serves as the overall symbol of evil happenings and doings as manifold as unemployment, inflation, armaments, imperialism and fascism. At the same time, many socialists tend to regard anything that *calls* itself socialism as essentially similar, be it Western Social Democracy, the Chilean Unidad Popular under Allende, the African Socialism of Sédar Senghor, Indian socialism, perhaps even the Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics and its satellites (Lauterbach, 1978). To the mind of more than a few socialists, the nomenclature of "socialism" absolves any system of the suspicion of villainy no matter what its actual content; conversely, anything dubbed "capitalism" automatically becomes wicked (Revel, 1976).

Communists see things in an even simpler manner since they can only think in totalitarian black-and-white terms (Lenin, 1939; Stalin, 1934). Anyone who is not a communist—and one faithful to the official Moscow-based party line of the moment—is by definition a villain (or at best a useful tool), though the exact classification of evildoing may vary for tactical reasons: the villains may be called capitalists, imperialists, Social Democrats, Trotzkyites, or fascists, but they always are pictured as conspiring to upset the perfection of Soviet "socialism" or, more outspokenly, the ever peaceful designs of Soviet foreign policy including its military actions (Monnerot, 1960).

Fascists, at the same time, share with the communists the totalitarian black-and-white mentality; whoever is not with them is automatically against them. He or she must, therefore, be a communist or a fellow traveller. Communism is perceived as the great villain regardless of whether the charges are made against the real or (more frequently) an imagined communism. Fascists see the evil entrenched in democratic parties and institutions, social

legislation, the United Nations, unorthodox culture, humane justice and education, or fairness toward ethnic and other minorities (Arendt, 1960). The point is that anything that is perceived as going wrong in life is blamed on villainy, in this case open or disguised communism.

Little has changed in this basic approach to social problems from the days of Mussolini's original Fascism and Hitler's National Socialism to the mentality of latter-day fascistic groups. These groups now classify themselves as anti-communist, patriotic, nationalist, even "democratic," and they have been endemic in Great Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and other countries since the second World War (Rogger and Weber, 1966).

More generally, even in countries with democratic traditions, *democracy* is a villain for those many who want to escape from freedom. In Mussolini's words, "Democracy is a regime without a king, but very often with many kings, far more exclusive, tyrannical and ruinous than a single king, even if he be a tyrant" (Readings, s.a.). The dictum of one strong leader is to relieve the confused or ignorant individual in the street from the necessity of any decision concerning who is right and who is wrong, in other words, relieve the individual from thinking. Such people "want to be told" by a totalitarian father who always knows best, and resent anyone who makes them *think* (Fromm, 1979). Another variety of villain hunting in an essentially free society has been supplied by some forms of populism. The Luddites saw mechanization as the villain, while later populists focused their ire on the railways, the gold standard or the bankers. In each case "the people" were seen as being systematically shortchanged by villains in economic life.

The Villain in Economics

Both in economic theory and economic policy, perceived villainy has been a frequent occurrence. On the policy level the basic evil for some is any state intervention into economic life, especially protectionism, planning, and anything that is rightly or wrongly perceived as socialism. The special case of protectionism toward the "developing nations" will be discussed later. In other cases, unemployment is blamed exclusively on excessive wage demands of the trade unions.

Conversely, for others the villain is private business, either through its anarchistic laissez-faire attitudes or through its monopolistic practices. More specifically, at the present time, the multinational corporations are blamed; their profiteering or exploitation practices and continuous technological streamlining, regardless of social costs, are seen as the root of inflation, unemployment, the uprooting of large population groups, and other evils. There have certainly been a number of well-balanced studies on the objective effects of multinational enterprises (United Nations, 1974), but well beyond the implications posited in these studies there is, for some public leaders, a

devilish force in action, whose doings explain the reasons why things keep going wrong in economic life.

This interpretation applies most conspicuously to financial villains, particularly to the presumed protagonists of inflation. The perceived culprits are government spending, power-seeking politicians, welfare policies, utopian full-employment ideals, lags in entrepreneurial spirit, the trade unions, insatiable wage demands, farm subsidies, vested interests of all kinds, deficient productivity consciousness, ideological rigidities, or class struggle from above or below. Any or all of these agents have been blamed, far in excess of objectively available data, for the vicious spread of inflation in the world or for other ills. Other perceived culprits have been monetarist intellectuals, the International Monetary Fund, foreign aid, excessive development ambitions, imperialism, the destructive designs of subversives, or simply the confusion in the minds of professional inflation-mongers.

On the theoretical level, insofar as theory does not interact directly with policy, there is no lack of villains, and here, too, they are of opposite types and potentially cancel out each other's evil effects. One of the villains is the perceived pollution of *pure* theory through the introduction of historical, sociological, political or psychological data and considerations (Lauterbach, 1959) into the otherwise abstract, therefore permanently valid, theorizing by economists about assumed human actions (Weisskopf, 1971). The ire of the abstract theoretician is especially great when psychological factors influencing economic actions—power drives, self-assertion needs, irrational or unconscious influences—are introduced into the discussion of such quasi-psychological concepts as risk-taking, expectations, and uncertainty. Those alien disciplines are seen as the villain that keeps disturbing the "genuine" or "pure" thinking in economic theory.

On the other hand, there also remains that opposite number in the world of economic villains, The Economic Man that rides roughshod over the social and mental characteristics of real people. Finally, there is the supposed evildoing seen either in the fashion of quantifying everything to the disregard of those factors in economic theory or policy that do not lend themselves to quantification; or, conversely, mistrusting any economic consideration which is expressed in figures or models. In all these cases there is a deeply rooted need to disclose the respective culprit who spoils things in the world of economics.

The Villain in Environmental Troubles

Related to the villains in economic policy but far exceeding them in the emotional involvement of the villain hunters, there are the perceived culprits of environmental damage which needs to be remedied by protection and planning. Here again, an unmistakable nucleus of truth is contained in the

sweeping charges against evildoers. These charges are increasingly frequent in our day as distinguished from a fairly recent past. Water and air *have* often been polluted, the soil *has* often been devastated, energy *has* often been wasted, and the ecological balance *has* frequently been disturbed (Gruen, 1964).

Yet, all these happenings have aroused in some quarters an ardent, emotion-laden search not only for effective remedies but for scapegoats and, behind them, the real villains. The focus of this search has varied but it certainly has been most fervent in the case of nuclear power plants. In the minds of some of their opponents, such plants are variously associated with nuclear bombs, reckless profiteering, threats to the offspring of the present generation and virtually with Satan himself. Any means of fighting such plants has been considered legitimate by the extremist wing among their foes: occupation of the sites concerned, street demonstrations, violence by some self-styled peace groups, destruction, mass hysteria, even alliance with fascistic groups of either the right-wing or left-wing phraseologies. The emissions from space, X-rays in the doctor's office, or other time-honored sources of radiation are usually neglected—nuclear power plants are seen as the sole villain in this case.

This myopia applies in an even more amazing manner to *other* sources of environmental trouble which have led to incomparably more actual damage than have nuclear plants. The chemical industry has caused some real disasters among which Seveso has only been the most conspicuous thus far. Yet, none of the anti-nuclear protest groups are known to have demanded a closing down of the chemical industry. Tanker disasters have poured thousands of tons of oil into the sea and have devastated many miles of coastlines. But no anti-nuclear groups have thus far insisted on outlawing the tankers or, for that matter, the equally dangerous platforms for offshore drilling. Bursts of power dams have flooded entire valleys and have killed hundreds of people, but who has heard of anti-nuclear groups demanding the prohibition of power dams? Tourism has resulted in growing pollution of beaches and natural monuments, but here again the ire of environmental protectors with nuclear emphasis has avoided hitting this target unequivocally.

Rational analysis easily misses the point in such cases: the search of the ever-protesting mind for a cleancut villain simply concentrates on one principal target at a time, which is picked in accordance with the most conspicuous traits observed among the possible candidates, if not by fashion or accident. This search will not let itself be deflected by objective factors of greater importance. Perhaps it should be emphasized that the search for atomic villainy is qualitatively different from the legitimate (and rational) concerns of other critics about a dependable and accident-free mastery of nuclear technology and, in the absence of such mastery, about the risk of possible radiation effects upon the biological endowment of future generations.

The Villain in Race Relations

In race relations we are once more entering an area of villain hunting which has often been discussed but which we must at least mention, in the context of this study. Certainly race relations in the world have been full of blatantly unjust and vicious prejudice, rigidity and, at times, beastly brutality. But this experience is supplemented by subjective villain images on the part of specific persons, groups and nations toward others. Such images always contain an important element of racist bigotry: if *they* are "inferior" then *I* am automatically "superior" no matter what may be my objective station in life or ability and achievement.

The deeper one's unconscious (or, for that matter, conscious) feelings of personal worthlessness, the stronger is the urge to "prove" to oneself and to others, by hook or by crook, that "we" are superior to "them." This applies collectively to racial and other groups no less than to individuals. The true believers concerned then endow the "inferior race" with all sorts of evil traits: it is supposedly lazy, dumb, criminal, treacherous, greedy, volatile, or just generally vicious. This image is, of course, designed to prove how virtuous and gifted one's own race and person are in comparison. Each group or nation picks its own scapegoat. In France the preferred target is the Algerians, in Great Britain the Pakistanis and Indians, in Iran, Iraq and Turkey it is the Kurds, in Austria the Yugoslavs and Turks, in the United States the Blacks and Hispanics, and in parts of Latin America the Indios. The Jews, of course, have served through the ages as a favorite example of villainy.

Racism in reverse, coupled with the corresponding villain images, is an almost inevitable consequence of such attitudes and practices, especially those going back to colonial rule: in parts of Africa *négritude* means superiority over the "white race" which then stands for every conceivable evil trait. One need only remember Idi Amin's rule in Uganda, as well as some Black Power movements in America (*Report*, 1968).

The case of Israel is especially tragic: the assumed superiority of European Jews over Oriental Jews, of the native-born Sabras over both these immigrant groups, and of all of them together over the Arabs parallels the feelings of superiority and hatred toward the Jews among the Arabs, who in turn have built up their full share of inter-Arab (Libyan-Egyptian, Algerian-Moroccan, Syrian-Iraqui) images of villainy.

Human groups in general apparently have great difficulty to free themselves from racial or ethnic images of villainy. The perennial conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland is partly ethnic and partly religious and social. The roles of the untouchables in India, the Somalis in Kenya, the Blacks in South Africa, the Ibos in Nigeria, and the southerners in the Sudan are equally tragic.

The Villain in Development Aspirations

Underdevelopment in the sense of economic and technological backward-ness and the abysmal poverty of many countries and billions of people, certainly represents an objectively ascertainable fact. The exact definition of these evils and the prevailing terminology have undergone far reaching changes in the course of the last few decades. Here again objective facts are more often than not supplemented (or distorted)by villain images designed to absolve the government, the power elite, or the group and nation concerned as the case may be, from any responsibility for actual or perceived shortcom-ings in social conditions (Lauterbach, 1974).

What device could come in handier for this purpose than using those nations that are better off as a convenient scapegoat without thinking much about the possibly *manifold* causes of the difference in well-being: is it merely the undeniable colonial exploitation, either in the past or at present and either political or economic, that accounts for the difference mentioned; or is it perhaps also higher productivity, greater effort, a more favorable climate, or the absence of devastating wars which explain that difference in large part at least? Have the social structures and domestic power relations in poverty-stricken countries something to do with the differences in well-being?

The prevailing assumption in today's world, chiefly in the poorer coun-tries, is that the industrialized states are the real villain. It is taken for granted that the greater wealth of these states can only have been achieved at the expense of the poorer countries, a zero-sum game. Surprisingly, the OPEC states whose tremendous price increases for oil since 1973 have contributed much to the plight of many poorer countries are usually absolved by the latter of any guilt. At times the OPEC states even aspire to speak for the Third and Fourth World they exploit, simply because they, too, remain insufficiently "developed" despite their new wealth.

The North-South-Dialogue has thus far taken place chiefly along the lines of this scapegoat-villain syndrome. So have the demands for a New Interna-tional Economic Order which would essentially be based on unilateral con-cessions, "reparations," tributes or handouts from the richer countries to the poorer ones. In the industrialized states, at the same time, feelings of guilt and fear are mixed with a revival of protectionist approaches toward the products (especially manufactured goods) of the "developing nations" even when ardent lip service is paid to free trade by neoliberal business leaders and governments. Foreign aid has also been a fairly frequent target of villain hunting in United States politics despite the almost negligible scale of such aid within the national economy.

Conflicting villain images thus divide the "rich" and the "poor" nations no less than do objective differences in well-being. It is only with considerable

hesitations and many setbacks that the poorer nations, in particular, have begun recently to search their own souls: they examine increasingly the part of the prevailing social relations, power structures, and cultural values of each population in the lag of its socio-economic and technological development.

Why People "Need" Villains

The inescapable question which suggests itself on the basis of the samples offered is, of course, *why* people, groups and nations are apparently in desperate "need" of villains. If no real ones are readily available, then they will make up imaginary ones. When this is not feasible and human beings and groups cannot possibly provide adequate outlets for that "need," natural phenomena may be used as more specific scapegoats: natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, hurricanes, soil erosion, or fluctuations in climate will serve the same purpose in absolving oneself, individually or collectively, from any share in the responsibility for foreseeing and preventing such evils in the first place (for example, through conservation of forests and food storage) and from coping with an emergency effectively when it occurs.

It is primarily the feeling of constant threat either from human action or from nature which tends to make many persons and groups anxious and distrustful. In the stone age a continuous fight for hunting grounds was indispensable to survival; today's fears concentrate on nuclear fission, but the essence of the perceived threat, especially from other nations, has remained similar. This includes threats to established cultural values in a given area whenever they are sufficiently defined for the individual to transcend his or her personal blinders.

The "need" for general villains as well as specific scapegoats unfortunately appears to be rooted in certain basic traits of human beings, especially in their collective forms of life. This remains true even with due allowance for cultural and historical variations. In some persons and groups the traits concerned may temporarily be confronted with effective countervailing forces; but sooner or later these traits may break through again with a vengeance. They involve, above all, the urges to hate and to destroy. These urges, it is true, are counteracted by certain constructive needs and love drives; but the trouble is that the love drives tend to succumb to the destructive urges, which to judge from all appearances are rather durable and forceful. These urges have survived all the progress (if this is the appropriate term) in civilization, social security, economic management, and democratic institutions. They have fostered the beastly dictatorships with which the world still teems toward the end of the twentieth century.

In each case the potential lessons of history were lost on the generations that followed, and often, after a few years or decades, even on the very

generation that had itself lived through specific adverse experiences. Human-kind needs to learn its lesson over and over again, but it frequently refuses to do so. Instead of focusing its energies on genuine social changes, it apparently prefers to walk blindly into ever new calamities—or to produce them—then to blame some external culprit for their existence.

The perceived villains need not necessarily be individuals or even groups. Aside from natural phenomena they may be associated with "human nature" or with abstract characteristics of people, a basic selfishness for example. In any case the constant search for villains provides a periodic outlet for the hateful and destructive urges of humankind. The many possible kinds of perceived villainy and its implementation by human beings, groups, and institutions may conceal the limitations of one's own view of the world. The perceived villainy may channel one's anxieties, especially when they appear on the collective level. It may personify one's own ignoble traits in the shape of a satanic evildoer.

Last but not least, these images may serve to identify or associate oneself, either consciously or subconsciously, with the lust for power that supposedly characterizes the respective villain. This association, if not affection, is hidden by emphatic and pathetic attempts to prove one's own moral and intellectual superiority and thus to absolve oneself from any responsibility for the perceived evils.

Villains versus Saviors

The propensities discussed here are age-old, though they have appeared time and again in whatever shape looked "modern" in a given period. Zealots and fanatics have been in existence even before the preaching prophets of the Old Testament and early Christianity or the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century. Regardless of differences in their respective doctrines or dogmas, they all held an unyielding belief that *their* values exceeded in validity those of any period before their own, that God was on their side, and that only eternity really mattered (Braunthal, 1979).

In fact Khomeiny's value system is basically far older than Islam; it goes back to Manichean-type thinking in black-and-white terms, the absolute cleavage between good and evil without any transition, doubt, or comprom-ise. In such a system of thought, evil is always present in human life, Satan is no less eternal than God, and there is no such thing or time in life as a situation without a villain. In Khomeiny's thought, the satanic evildoer has usually been America, at times the Soviet Union or Iraq, but someone else might symbolize evil in the future.

Other examples of the villain-and-savior syndrome have been supplied in our period by the mass murders in Cambodia, first by the Pol Pot regime

against perceived anti-communist villains and then by the Vietnamese com-
munist invaders against the Pol Pot communists as well as the general popula-
tion. Soon after, Afghanistan, with its pro-Soviet regime, was invaded from
the north by Soviet troops who undertook to liberate the country from
supposed imperialist villains from both the west and the east. This was
followed by the Soviet-sponsored military coup in Poland designed to free its
shattered economy and society from western imperialist villains and their
influence on Polish workers.

In November 1979 a self-styled Mahdi with several hundred Moslem
followers seized the Great Mosque in Mecca, the holiest shrine of Islam, in a
utopian attempt to cleanse the religion and its worldly power centers, includ-
ing revolutionary Iran, from the villainous contamination wrought by greed,
luxury, and Western thought. One might also mention the constant fight of
Colonel Quaddafi to free not only Libya but the entire Islamic world from
various villains operating out of Cairo, Washington, and Tel-Aviv.

The unprecedented flow of refugees by the millions has been in large degree
a result of the persecution of supposed villains on a mass scale, or the fear of
such persecution. Entire population groups of an ethnic, religious, or ideolog-
ical denomination try to escape even at the risk of losing their property,
livelihood, and time-honored habitat and arrive starved, freezing, and penni-
less in some strange country—if indeed they arrive at all. In each case it is left
to others, in the final analysis, to judge who are the real culprits: the refugees
themselves as their persecutors maintain, or the latter as most other people
believe.

In any case such mass misery has afflicted the Jews in Nazi-dominated
Europe, the ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe, many thousands of Cubans
under the Castro regime, Palestinian Arabs, various minorities in India, the
Chinese and others in Vietnam, the Afghans under Soviet occupation, the
Cambodians under Vietnamese rule, and the "capitalists" in China. These
groups have all been uprooted either *as* villains or *by* villains depending on the
point of view, only to carry on their miserable life in emergency camps,
sometimes for years, or at best in strange new surroundings.

Villains and Violence

Western European and American beliefs in the general power of reason
and persuasion, and in the inevitable final victory of "progress" and "moder-
nization" have elsewhere run head on into value systems of persons, groups,
and nations with entirely different perceptions of time, eternity, and evil. In
the West itself, too, the need for villains has actually shown, time and again,
its undiminished, if sometimes concealed, power and durability. The interna-
tional spread of terrorism can in large part be explained by such an uncontrol-
lable need. The hostages or victims are in each case presented as villains, for

example as spies. They also symbolize the "real" villains in the background who are to be punished morally or financially.

At the same time, contemporary terrorism represents a specific manifestation of the more general phenomenon of fanatic villain hunting. This is true not only in a conceptual, but also a perceptual sense (Haynal, 1980). The historical manifestations of violent fanatism have been manifold: sectarian group obsession, collective delirium, crusades, inquisition mania, witch hunting, jingoism, racism, antisemitism, and so forth. In each case a specific creed is driven up to the point of lunacy; and there is only one step from a seemingly rational mass behavior to collective madness, as the rise of Naziism in Germany demonstrated during the thirties. This propensity for collective madness provides the general background of the perennial quest for specific scapegoats and real villains.

In our period, a special variety of the attitudes concerned has been presented by various amorphous but violent "youth movements" which have been driving their continuous search for villains to extremes. The same young people who on the personal level tend to show anxiety, helplessness, vulnerability, and a desperate need for appreciation, easily turn as participants in excited street demonstrations (for example, in Zurich, 1980) into bearers of blind violence and hateful aggression. Mass hysteria develops, directed toward the police, who may then succumb to an analogous search for villains. Negation of governmental structures in general occurs simultaneously with attempted blackmail toward the government, and destructive action of almost any kind (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1981).

The spearheading group is apparently small, as a rule, but it may enjoy the sympathy and solidarity of many more young people who are at a loss in trying to face their own situation at home, at school or on the labor market and to integrate themselves into a society which they do not understand and which makes little effort to understand them (Fromm, 1976). The testimony of participants or sympathizers (Kappeler, 1981) shows that from rock festivals to street action there is an evident need for belonging, for being together in an anonymous manner (Mast, 1980). It is often accompanied by violent intolerance toward outsiders and an unwillingness to understand them. A basically anarchistic mistrust exists here toward The State, in fact toward any kind of structure including political parties (Horowitz, 1964). The result is a search for villains driven to its extremes, a search which seriously reduces the energies available for real social change.

The Outlook for Perceived Villainy

Society, with its groupings and norms, has become more complex and less transparent than it was a few decades earlier. The world of the "grown-ups" looks to many young people both forbidding and irrelevant. Moreover, the

welfare-and-performance society arouses excessive expectations which are then fulfilled, at best, in a strictly material sense. Many young people are thus left without meaningful values. The surplus of leisure time along with nausea toward "consumerism" leads many to the reactions mentioned, even though they may well, with advancing age, make their peace with society, despite its continuing imperfections. Before this stage is reached individually, however, they will have spearheaded the widespread search for villains .

There have, of course, been frequent counter trends to this age-old search and quite a few people remain comparatively free of the mentality discussed here. There have been more than a few examples, individually and collectively, of human generosity and forgiveness, as well as peace movements for international understanding. There have also been public leaders and intellectuals who have patiently dampened the zeal of the rank and file to engage in a persecution of perceived villains. But somehow it has been the villain hunting urge that has managed to break through the obviously thin layer of "reasonableness" and has proved its strong dynamism and effective driving power. Shall we conclude then that the human mind is warped in its very essence? Most people instinctively revolt from any such overt belief which would leave them hopelessly discouraged.

Yet, the historical evidence to date militates against any glib optimism. It is at least an open question whether the human species will ever come to its senses for more than a brief spell, do away with its deeply ingrained quest for villains, and at long last face its real needs. The occurrences my generation has witnessed include two world wars and preparations for a third, nuclear one, along with fascist and communist forms of totalitarianism, horrifying atrocities in many regions of the world, and an economy and technology running amuck at home in the midst of "progress." Other problems of our time include the spread of drug addiction and crime, urban blight, far reaching disintegration of civilized relations and recognized values, and, last but not least, a never-ending hunt for villains—a hunt which in extreme cases reveals cruel, destructive, even paranoid traits in a great many people.

All these experiences, unfortunately, have supplied substantial reasons to avoid unrealistic forms of optimism. Remaining hopes can at best rely on the fact that there are different *degrees* of motivation for villain hunting and scapegoating, and that many persons may remain susceptible to a rational evaluation of social happenings and problems. Moreover, reference groups, through conscious encouragement of well-balanced approaches to social problems, may achieve growing effects after all, and the time-honored urges for villain hunting and scapegoating may increasingly be channelled into constructive drives. Finally, searching one's own soul honestly may permit growing differentiation between a hateful interpretation of someone else's opinions as fiendish villainy and a well-considered rejection of such opinions on intellectual grounds after serious scrutiny.

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