

PAIN, VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTIVENESS IN THE MODERN TIMES*

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Abstract

The paper starts with a brief description of the mythical moment when Adam and Eve are expelled from heaven, based on the biblical version of the Old Testament. From there on, pain is shown as inherent to all human beings. It differentiates pain and grief and analyzes the human attempts of avoidance when facing pain. At the same time, it goes through the concept of death instinct in Freud, specifying the ways pain is being presented during the evolution of this concept. It defines the death instinct until the limits of plain destructivity and it attempts to understand its consequences in the culture and in the individual when facing it.

The first part of the Old Testament, the Genesis, tells how God created the universe. It tells the story of Adam, his happiness and innocence while he lived in heaven together with Virago, a woman who was made from his rib. Everything was perfect until temptation shows itself in the shape of a serpent and invites the woman to eat the only fruit among all the other ones, which was forbidden to them by God. Then, Virago desiring of those fruits that she thought to be delicious, eats one, and also offers it to Adam. From then on, her eyes opened and she comes to know the good and the evil. They realized that they were naked, and made them clothes made of fig leaves. And God punished them. He told the woman that she would have her work multiplied and that she would give birth with pain. She would be under her husband's power, to which she should obey. She told the man that he would have to work in order to support the woman and that she would produce thorns; he should eat the bread with the sweat of his face until he could return to the land where he came from, for he was dust and dust he should become again.

Adam names his woman Eve, for she would be the mother of all the living. And God expels Adam and Eve from heaven.

Pain, grief, the lack of the idea of immortality for the human offspring appears in the mythical moment. Mankind is presented with all his physical vulnerability and psychic nostalgia for perfection, only possible to imagine in the early times of narcissism and so prematurely lost, as in the lost heaven. A five year old boy is already able to tell his therapist: -“ I would like to have my father to be together with us, but he is not coming to see me, because he had a fight with my mother, they didn't like each other anymore... But he didn't like me anymore either, he didn't want to see me anymore”.

Can there be a bigger pain for boy who is only five years old? What sin has he committed? The pain issue brings us back to the pain due to the loss of the object.

In “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, Freud (1925) states that we know very little about pain. He defines pain as something that happens every time a stimulus takes place in the periphery of the skin, and it breaks the protection shield against stimuli, from then on acting as an instinctual stimulus, against which the muscle action is impotent. If pain should come from an internal organ, the situation will be the same. He underlines that the peripheral stimulus, essential to pain, is totally absent in the situation where the child experiences anxiety. Nevertheless, he discusses that it is not by chance that one uses the expression of internal or mental pain in a daily basis, nor that one considers the loss of an object as an equivalent to mental pain, for the intense cathexis for longing that is focused on the object which is missed or lost, it creates the same economical conditions that are generated by the centralization in the body that has been damaged. Being it so, the transition of physical pain to mental pain would simply correspond to a change from the narcissistic cathexis, to the object cathexis.

Facing such statement, we are lead to assume that no human being would miss facing a certain amount of meant pain, because our growth is built upon inevitable losses of the love objects of childhood. For this reason somewhere inside all of us remains the longing for the return of the lost heaven, to the total, mythical satisfaction. And the pain being something inevitable, the matter left would be of how could we feel it and how involved it would be with the man's growth process. In the biblical myth pain appears in the body, offering itself as the possibility of loss and then we discover pain,

sided with sexuality and the emergence of life. Pain seems to have impartial connections with life. Could we think that pain would be an important expression of life?

In “Instincts and their Vicissitudes”, Freud (1915) deals with the issue of the anti-tethic pair sadism-masochism. He emphasizes primary sadism that turns against the individual in a reflexive way, transforming itself into masochism. In this stage, the individual is no longer the subject in action; he appears to be passive and starts to find pleasure in his own pain. The erotic pain marks the moment, by the passiveness and by the internal inscription of the object; it is the moment that the individual incorporates the object in an imaginary way (Conte, 2002). And only later, in a third stage, this same individual would be able to become active again, subject of the action, and one more time would direct his aggressiveness (which has now become erotized) towards the outside, under the shape of destructiveness against the objects. Therefore, in this stage of the Freudian theory, pain is intimately connected to sexuality, transports the erotism to the objects and brings identifications.

Conte (2002) points out Freud’s question about why did his grandson in the reel play, known as the “fort-da”, puts together a pleasure feeling with an experience of pain.

This game is told by Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920). That is where he recaptures and transforms the drive theory. It is defined by the maintenance of the instinctual duality, now as: life instinct and death instinct. In this text, he characterizes the death instinct as a silent one, for not having a clear representation and for acting upon the organism mingled with the sexual instinct (or drive). Freud finds himself analyzing the matter of the death instinct and how it connects with sexuality. In the same year, he writes about a four year old child’s associations, in which he demonstrates that children know where babies come from, and they know it is held by the father. Interprets the child’s fantasies, opening up the area of child sexuality in an increasingly more profound way. A more concerned Freud with the origin of life arises, with the sexual expressions, and maybe for that reason, he may have he may have introduced the death instinct as an almost mythical concept, in the form of a ghost who prowls the prime of living.

Even so, as a consequence of this concept, Freud is almost forced to take over the matter of sadism-masochism. In 1924, the reinstatement of the existence of the concept of death instinct in a more radical way was mandatory. He places destructivity as a synonym of the death instinct and links it to the sexual instinct, transforming it through this liaison sadism that is projected towards the outside. He discusses that had destructivity not linked with sexuality and were to be expelled in the form of sadism, it would have destroyed the individual's organism. He signals, nevertheless that despite this expulsion, there would always be a residue of the death instinct inside the psyche, in the shape of a primary masochism, which he calls erogenous, and that will be the foundation for future expressions of masochism (moral, feminine) that may secondarily come to reinforce it. Then we come to clearly run across with the origin of life, and the development of sexuality, intertwined with destructivity and with pain, which would work as a beacon, guiding our relations with the others. This way of his of seeing things does not change. But Freud continues thinking about the concept of death instinct until the end of his life. Truthfully he simply takes more and more courageously the responsibility of his conception of death instinct, and starts to redefine destructivity as its representative, being autonomous from sexuality, or from life instinct.

For Garcia-Roza (1990), the real "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"(1920) will be found by us ten years later in "Civilization and its Discontents"(1929). The author stresses that until this moment, the manifestations of the death instinct were limited to the sadism and to the masochism and as a consequence to the enunciation of the death instinct with the sexual instinct. In "Civilization and its Discontents", he was able to let go of these concepts and really define the death instinct as the real destructiveness. By doing this, he declares an irremediable antagonism between the demands of the instincts (drives) and denounces the civilization's restrictions. According to Garcia-Roza (1990, p.134), "Acknowledging a destructive instinct as something totally aside from sexuality, was compared to acknowledging the fundamental and irreducible evil of the human being". And Freud (1929, p.142) acknowledged that when he says: "I know that in the sadism and in the masochism we always see before us manifestations of the

destructive instinct (directed to the outside and towards the inside), strongly mingled with the erotism, but I can no longer understand how could we have neglected the ubiquity of the non erotic aggressiveness and destructivity and have failed to give the appropriate place for it in our life. (desire for destruction when directed to the inside, in fact is not in the reach of our perception, unless it is overlaid with erotism.)” For Freud (1929), destructivity becomes an autonomous tendency and it has its origins in the human being.

For that matter, from this moment on, we can understand the so-called Freudian death instinct, according to three paths. First, connected to erotism, in the shape of the anti-tethic pair sadism-masochism, as it has been already shown, and which can manifest itself through behavioral or symptomatic tendencies. Second, as the plain destructive desire, autonomous, not connected to sexuality and turned to the outside, manifest in attack and destruction attitudes open against the other. And third, in the shape of autonomous destructivity, it changes in a silent way inside the organism through a premonition of stages of disconnection of the individual, without it being necessarily followed by and expression of pain.

I will start going from here on to compose some considerations upon these two last paths of the death instinct in order to try to explain the courses pain can lead to which follow them and the reflections of it in each case on subjectivity.

In 1932, Freud replies to a letter of Einstein’s in which he asks him for a medical consultation since he is the specialist of the human nature, trying to better understand the motives that lead men to make war by doing that trying to find world peace. Freud, nevertheless, in this reply letter that was transformed into an important paper is rather bitter, or realistic, who knows. It is hard to make a sure statement, for the severity that defines men is until this day systematically confirmed by history. It is written already at the beginning of the text: “But allow me to replace the word “power” for the nude and crudest word “violence”? (p.146). He justifies this heavy proposition of his explaining that men, since the primeval times, have always tried to resolve their conflicts of interest through violence and superiority upon the other. At first, they imposed the superiority of

muscle strength, afterwards the best tools and weapons, which already assumed an intellectual superiority. He signals that the community will inevitably be composed of elements of uneven force and hence, will be organized based on domination, quoting as a pattern the model used by Heggel the one of the lord and the slave. This way, it emphasizes the impossibility of totally eliminate the aggressive drives of man. Nevertheless, he cogitates if one could only try to deviate in such a way, that they would not need to find an expression through war. He underlines that if the wish to go to war was an effect of the destructive instinct, there would be nothing better to counteract than its antagonist- Eros. For that matter, everything that would favor the strengthening of the emotional bonds among men, should work against the war. He adds, even if there wouldn't be anything most capable of uniting mankind in such a solid way, and subject its instinctual life to the community interests than intellectuality. And he concludes that everything that stimulated the civilization's growth would work against the war.

In modern times, we observe that even though the Freud we read in this paper may seem in the first glance pessimistic, he still underestimated what men continue to do against one another and how much the destructive instinct (drive) when directed towards the outside, continues to generate so much pain to his fellow creature. He points out on the other hand, an alternative mode of action for the mater of the human destructivity, which would be the thinking process.

In the "Project" Freud detaches, "that it is in relation to his fellow creatures that the human being learns to know" (1895, p. 447). He explains that some perceptions originated by this other similar being, will coincide with the memory of visual expressions very similar to the ones emanated from his own body. The individual will then trace his own experiences and find again in himself what he saw in the other one. Freud still detaches that a scream emanated by the other, would bring back to his own scream, leading the individual to remember his own pain. The scream and the pain would turn out to be signals for the formulation of the first judgments elaborated by the individual and would be predecessors in the construction of his thinking process.

This way, we get to an apparently unexpected and contradictory conclusion. If human destructivity generates pain in principle and if pain gives origin to the thinking process, maybe the main possibility of rescuing destructivity in men would be in the intrinsic creative possibility of pain, generated by the death instinct itself. When pain is possible to be thought about, it transforms itself in pain and when suffering pain, the human being may look for creative ways out for his existence's problematic. Did not Descartes say that thinking was the same as existing? Why not imagine that to undergo pain through the thinking process can be the creative way out for the existence and that the death instinct offers creative ways out as well for the human mind, as it favors the thinking process.

Garcia-Roza (1990) confirms this perspective signaling that the death instinct is renewing, as it questions everything that exists. He explains that while Eros turns to unify and to undifferentiate, the death instinct produces differences, refuses sameness and provokes the emergence of new forms in nature and in culture. The author still stresses that this is what Hyppolite showed in his analysis of the Freudian paper "The Negative". In that article the destructive tendency is represented by the "no" which enables one to make it negative and by doing so, to think instead of expelling from the mind something that would be impeded to be thought of in its direct affirmative. So, the "no" as a symbol of the death instinct, inaugurates the thinking and the destruction takes the meaning of destroying the old ways. And we know that giving up old ways generates pain. So, thinking the new way hurts. Had it not been so, maybe the first woman would have been able to say "no" to the serpent, the caricature of the most primitive and destructive desires of mankind, in order to create a possibility to make them come true in a symbolic way, in her mind through her thinking process. For this to happen, she would have to undergo the pain of feeling the frustration and the lament for desires she would only like to experiment, denied as not her own ones.

Giacola Junior (without data) says that the pathway from animal to man to the political animal is performed above all through the organization of the instinctual chaos and that it is through this meaning that the Nietzschean genealogy can be understood. He

stresses that according to Nietzsche the animal-man is an entity that has an exceeding instinct. And that the occidental civilization is stamped by a radical instinctual antagonism, that can be noticed through two ideological forms of the act: one the castration moral or the religious moral and the other one would be its antithetic pair which could be the passion's immoral. The first one would define itself as a religious moral pedagogy with a Socratic-platonic-Christian incuse, which would demand the extirpation of passions. The second one counterworks this one, and this transfiguration can be noticed at once through the usage of an expectedly psychoanalytic vocabulary. It is about a welcoming and positive posture towards human passions. He comments that for Nietzsche there is always a time for passions to be inauspicious, stupid and they bring their victims down, but in a posterior time they associate with the spirit, they would become spiritualized. He points out that formerly, due to this stupidity of the first time, one wished to annihilate the passions, but the praxis of passions lead to a reconciliation of the exceeding of that immense variety of drives and disavowed, castaway, repressed and calumniated affects by the Platonic-Christian tradition. The repossession of its tamed, sublimated and transformed force is in search. For the author, what matters is our strength of mastery over the passions, not its extirpation. And the big man's strength would be in the large freedom space for his passions, nevertheless he would have to be strong enough to tame those monsters, for no creature could evade itself from nature. Thus, against conception of the human nature, sublimation of the instinctual chaos counter-works as the destiny of greatness to be reached. Thus, Giacola Jr. (without date) states that from Nietzsche on, men of the end of the 19th century gave a significant step forward in order to accept his own nature without bitterness, feeling less ashamed of his drives, and trying to be strong enough to bare this outlook upon his own being. Without the idealist cynicism he transformed the moral strictness in intellectual probity, proposing as a task for mankind the permanent possibility to excel itself. But it is obvious that this is not an easy task. If in one hand we never had such lucidity about human nature, on the other hand, we have not been able to tame it yet.

And who knows this demand could be of such greatness taken for granted in the contemporary culture that it would bring the post modern man to refuse to think more and more, making him center his concerns mainly in his own body and in the action, in a frenetic search for immediate solutions, where therapeutical alternatives and the use of medication dribble with the possibility of undergoing pain, for they abolish important matters such as temporality, subjectivity and alterity. The drive without a mediation goes out one more time in a gross way as pure discharge, leading to unthinkable limits in actions such as what happened on September 11 in which we had to watch without the possibility to signify the destruction in its pure state, leading all of us to an experience of horror and impotence. It is once more repeated in the war against Iraq, and still in the streets of our country on a daily basis, in an apparent absurd and non-sense violence which we watch startled or even worse, as if we were under anesthesia. If we are under anesthesia the alterity is abolished and we do no longer qualify our subjective state making it possible for the other person to be destroyed without it being possible for us to feel his pain. Suffering is then eliminated.

These states of not thinking and not feeling are seen in our daily private practice in an increasing manner through more severe and more frequent pathologies. Addictions generally speaking, anorexias and bulimias that are followed by a compulsive state that is many times of such intensity that brings us to a peculiar repetition to the death instinct expressed almost in a pure way, threatening these people's lives as a matter of fact. One can feel them mainly in the pathologies of emptiness where the withdrawal, which characterizes the death instinct acts in the interior of the organism in a silent way undoing emotional bonds with the objects or even destroying the individual's capacity of representation, leading him to states of profound indifference and apathy typical of the so-called white depressions. We are in the century of depression nevertheless we are not talking about noisy depressions, rather silent ones, insidious ones, covered by a noisy culture, almost scandalous, but with serious difficulty to signify pain as well as to express it in its full extension. We scream for the lack of material wealth, but we silence towards the most profound values

of the human being. Where did our scream remain, regarding the episode of September 11, where we watched through our modern televisions, which transmitted through multiple channels news from all over the world at the time that they occur? What do we do with this news? How do we give them meaning? Are we able to signify them or we are only able to pile them in some shelves of an old closet in the storage of old useless things of our memory for them to remain there forgotten and without a meaning? What do we do with so many things that we do not give meaning to? To the things that cannot be signified and reach the word and not even our scream of pain there is only one word left for them: withdraw. And could it not be the withdrawal, so silent as it is, closer to the noisy violence than it seems?

Lacan (1998, p.376) says: Don't we all know that at the ends where that talking quits itself meet, is where field of violence starts, and that it already reigns there, even if we don't tease it? There is where silence and violence intertwine and mix with one another.

Maybe it will be up to the new century that is starting, the mission of taking over our own pain in thinking of the destructive potential that the human being means to his fellow creatures and to himself, much beyond the simple masochist pleasure or the trivial sadistic, but connected to ways of rejoice that surpass our pleasure and reach the boundaries of the most crude and pure death instinct. Such modalities silence our pain obstruct our suffering and still are not able to find expression in the verbal, for representing what is most primitive inside every one of us. The scream, the screamed pain is life. Death is silent. The death instinct when comes in a noisy manner can create new shapes, when silences its strange paths lead to the end.

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