Featured Article: Hate, Individualism, and the Social Bond

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REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

Much of my (KMF) writing and research has focused on the exploration of individual and cultural values. I began my academic work using ideas and methods borrowed from the field of social psychology and carried these same tools with me when I undertook a cross-cultural study of values and aspirations. However, over time, I have come to see that the limited perspective of social psychology so narrows the field of vision that it crops out portions of the human landscape that imbue values with meaning. I have since widened my scope to incorporate rich ideas from social and political theory (and other disciplines), and through this interdisciplinary inquiry on hatred hope that a broadened perspective will enrich our understanding of social values. In particular, it seems fruitful to examine hatred not only by looking at the causes and cures long promulgated by social psychologists (empathy, social contact, group dynamics, etc.), but also by attending to concerns of social theorists who explicate the risks (alienation? emotional isolation? hate?) that accompany modern society’s emphasis on individualism.

After a number of years working mainly in the field of academic and professional counseling psychology, my (FCR) interests turned sharply in the direction of theoretical and philosophical psychology, including the philosophy of social science. I have spent a lot of time trying to identify what I and others call “hidden assumptions,” potent but commonly unidentified conceptual and moral underpinnings of psychological theories and the interpretations of research findings. Exploring the topic of hate seems quite valuable in this regard, given that efforts to cope with the enduring threat of hate and violence, in ways that are often not fully appreciated or acknowledged, seems to me to motivate and shape a great deal of modern social science and professional psychology. I hope the reverse is true as well, that these reflections shed some light on the broad topic of hate and violence.
Shame exists everywhere there is a mystery.

—Nietzsche

THE PROBLEM AND THE CURE

Baird and Rosenbaum (1992) remind us of the painful truth that “The phenomenon of hatred is as close to us as, perhaps closer than, our own skin.” They go on to note that we all “know experientially what it is to seethe with passion against another human being. From our earliest years we have experienced attractions and repulsions to others that in some way transcend reason and thought” (1992: 9).

Many theories have been spun out over the years to account for the depths of hatred and enmity and the heights of forgiveness and love that human beings can exemplify. A few of these writers give the sense that they are trying to explain the phenomena of hatred and violence in a detached or merely “scientific” manner. It is too personal and disturbing for that. They want to understand hate better in order to do something about it, to overcome it, mollify it, contain it, therapize it, extirpate it at the root, or something else, in order to diminish or eliminate it. One’s theory or account of the nature of hate is surely internally related to one’s proposed remedy for it. The proposed cure only makes sense in light of the diagnosis of it, and if one changes, so must the other.

In this article, we suggest that a useful analysis of the causes and cure of hate at this time may need to take into account the somewhat unique moral climate or context we inhabit today. Of course, it is hazardous to generalize about our cultural or moral condition in such a complex and multifarious world. But clear ideas can be useful even if they simplify and risk oversimplifying, so long as they are employed with a fair amount of caution and humility.

To begin with, it strikes us that our current society is marked by both a profound sense of the rights, dignity, and inherent worth of every individual and a kind of pervasive depersonalization of human life that contributes in various ways to mutual indifference, hostility, and often physical or emotional violence that show up in the family, the “clash of civilizations,” and many places in between. How might we make sense out of this unique sensitivity to—and yet propensity to fall into—hatred and violence?

It is worth noting that, in the view of a number of critics, the ethical and political ideals of
a modern democratic society like our own—their great decency and worth notwithstanding—tend to produce a paradoxical condition of just this sort. A loosely associated group of contemporary cultural critics and political theorists who sometimes go by the name “communitarian,” “liberal communitarian,” or “neo-Aristotelian” are significant voices in intellectual circles today, and they appear to have influenced a number of educators and policy makers as well. One can find their analysis of our political condition illuminating without deeming their approach to be perfect in every detail or to have identified flawless means for correcting the ills they describe.

These broadly communitarian thinkers try to sketch a positive alternative to conventional politics of the left (promoting the welfare state, personal or “lifestyle” autonomy, and economic rights) and the right (advocating unfettering the market economy, increasing individuals economic freedom, and property rights) on the American scene today. Both sides, in this view, reflect important goods and values, such as compassion and personal responsibility, but both tend to aggravate our difficulties by stressing freedom or autonomy at the expense of community and mutual responsibility. Their noisy differences obscure a number of basic assumptions and ideals they actually have in common. They both tend to celebrate rights and downplay responsibilities (Glendon: 1992), as communitarian thinkers often put it.

In this paper, we suggest that the social sciences (and those in many other academic quarters, as well) have a long, admirable, history of seeking to understand and remediate the myriad ways that human beings discriminate against, depersonalize, and often level hate against other people. Without meaning to downplay the good intentions and moral progress of these efforts in any way, we argue that they may be hampered by being couched in a kind of one-sided individualism that to some extent throws the baby out with the bath water, or excessively weakens all social ties and loyalties in order to undercut oppressive or domineering ones. One challenge, then, is to dig a little deeper into the problem so that problems of alienation and hate are not inadvertently perpetuated in the cure proposed for them.

MODERN INDIVIDUALISM AND THE “AMBIGUITY OF FREEDOM”

In premodern or traditional societies, people for the most part apprehend themselves in a taken-for-granted manner as participants in a meaningful cosmic order or drama built around the sense that life moves toward the end or telos of a shared human existence in harmony with Nature or God. That goal is a kind of life characterized by acquired human qualities or virtues
such as courage, justice, or love. The moral temper of the modern age, by contrast, has always been strenuously anti-authoritarian and emancipatory. At its core lies a Promethean impulse that is willing to sacrifice the consolations of membership in a larger order for the full measure of what it takes to have human freedom and dignity. A new picture of life and living emerges in which would-be autonomous individuals who see themselves as having largely cut their ties to tradition and external authority pursue their desires or the good life however they see fit—although this usually has been thought to include a benevolent commitment to extend this same freedom to all humankind. Instead of the accent being on belonging and responsibility to a wider social, moral, and cosmic order, individuals now tend to view themselves as quite separate from each other and the world, with the world and others to a great extent are seen as providing opportunities, raw materials, or constraints in regard to individual purposes and projects.

Presciently, in the 1940’s, Erich Fromm (1975/47), who certainly embraced modern ideals of democracy and the freedom of all, nevertheless stressed the perils of what he termed the “ambiguity of freedom” in modern times. We have, says Fromm, a well-developed sense of “freedom from” arbitrary authority and from dogmatic or irrational impediments to freedom and to exercising greater control over nature and ourselves. But we sorely lack a corresponding sense of “freedom to” or “freedom for” that would give some context, direction, or deeper purpose to our increased freedom and opportunity. The result, he feels, is that we tend to become interchangeable cogs in the social machinery, to become directionless and empty, to be led by the nose by whatever “sells” in the marketplace, including a widespread “personality market” in which even personal qualities must be revised to accommodate the impulses or preferences of others, and to treat others and ourselves as depersonalized objects. Hungry for substance but unable to find it, in Fromm’s view, we tend to sell out our freedom to fanaticism, the illusion of total fulfillment in romantic love, craving and seeking the approval of others at all costs, numerous escapisms, or just going shopping. Interestingly, Fromm felt that this cultural or moral condition was responsible for many of the emotional problems in living of modern people, a theme that has been explored in detail recently by John Schumaker (2001).

In recent years, numerous critically-minded psychologists (the authors are academic psychologists) have documented the enormous extent to which theory and research in their field, and in the social sciences generally, are shaped at their core by a “disguised ideology” or tacit ideals that derive from this putatively one-sided modern individualistic moral outlook and
program for living (e.g., Cushman 1990; Frank 1978; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon 1999; Slife, Smith, and Burchfield 2003). Theories and therapies in psychology seem to build around an essentially ethical core that renders human behavior essentially a matter of the instrumental prowess, personal self-realization, or existential freedom of individual selves.

Only occasionally do these accounts of human action or personality make mention of individuals’ moral ties or obligations to others, no doubt partly because of their aspiration to hard-nosed “scientific” status. However, this omission fails to do justice to the ethical seriousness of most of these theories. They are best viewed as animated at their core by the distinctive moral outlook or faith of modern times, often termed “liberal individualism” or “philosophic liberalism.” This outlook regards human agents as imbued with inherent worth and dignity and as possessed of natural or human rights. It is intended to leave the selection of ends in living to purely private choice while still insisting on adherence to formal principles of fairness or procedural justice. Thus, it hopes both to protect us from dogma and arbitrary authority while still giving needed ethical guidance.

Liberal individualism represents a noble effort to affirm freedom while avoiding license, and to eliminate dogmatism without abandoning serious moral commitments. Nevertheless, it seems to reflect a dangerously one-sided “freedom from.” Justice is strictly procedural so that no one can define the good life for anyone else. Yet commitment to human dignity and rights do seem to sketch out a way of life that is taken to be morally superior or good in itself. Thus, this approach seems to be embroiled in the paradox of advocating a thoroughgoing neutrality toward all values as a way of promoting certain basic values of liberty, tolerance, and human rights. But what is to prevent that principled neutrality toward all notions of the good life from extending to those basic values of liberty and human dignity as well, undermining their convincingness and stripping them of any possibility of rational defense (Kolakowski 1986; Sarason 1986)? Also, it has been suggested (Bell 1978: xv ff.) that the insistent characterization of human action and motivation as exclusively self-interested may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The direct pursuit of security and happiness, when it defines what life is all about, seems to increasingly dissolve the capacity to respect and cherish others.

The communitarian thinker Philip Selznick (1992: 6 ff.) reminds us aptly of the positive side of the modern liberal outlook in that the “transition from sacred to secular modes of thought enhances morality in that it tends to reduce narrow-mindedness and bigotry.” Still, this modern
outlook brings benefits of greater individual freedom, increased equality of opportunity, efficiency, accountability, and the rule of law only at the price of “cultural attenuation” and “some loosening of social bonds.” Thus, there has been a “movement away from densely textured structures of meaning,” like a shared mythology or time-honored customs, to “more abstract forms of expression and relatedness,” like being a private individual in a liberal democracy or market economy. This movement “may contribute to civilization—to technical excellence and an impersonal morality—but not to the mainsprings of culture and identity.” The price to be paid for “cultural attenuation” becomes clearer with the passage of time. As Selznick puts it, “modernity, especially in its early stages, is marked by an enlargement of individual autonomy, competence, and self-assertion. In time, however, a strong, resourceful self confronts a weakened cultural context; still later, selfhood itself becomes problematic” (1992: 6 ff.).

Michael Sandel (1996) critically dissects the sort of liberal individualism he feels serves as the admirable but flawed “public philosophy” of modern democracies like ours. He suggests that we live, or try to live, in what he calls a “procedural republic.” A key element of the procedural republic is the “ideal of neutrality,” according to which government should remain strictly neutral on the question of the good or decent life and insist only on tolerance, fair procedures, and respect for individual rights, respecting people’s freedom to choose their own values. The essence of freedom is the capacity of persons to choose their own values and ends coupled with an obligation to respect others’ rights to do the same. One difficulty with this view concerns how we are going to justify the ideal of neutrality itself which, after all, defines our way of life. What are modern ideals of neutrality and individual rights based on if not some understanding of the highest human good? If they represent only some arbitrary preference about how to live, it is hard to see how we could defend them or be able to practice the restraint and respect for others that these liberal ideals require us to hold fast to in the face of great temptations to do otherwise.

Another key element of the public philosophy of the procedural republic is what Sandel terms “the unencumbered self” or “the liberal self,” the ideal of a separate, choosing self that is subject to no obligations it has not itself authored or chosen (except to respect the similar independence and rights of others). This view may lend support to important values of equal respect and non-discrimination. But Sandel (1996) and others argue that it simply cannot make sense of many of our most cherished connections and commitments to family, friends,
community, nation, and so forth. Many of our deepest feelings and attachments, indeed our very identity, in part, seem to be defined by these connections and commitments and constituted by the traditions and communities from which we come. The unencumbered self seems shockingly unreal in many ways, and as much a recipe for isolation and emptiness as for a fulfilling kind of freedom.

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It seems important to us to appreciate that what we are calling liberal individualism and the ways it shapes many diverse modern ideologies or moral outlooks at their core. Richardson, et al. (1999) argue that utilitarianism, Kantian or deontological ethical viewpoints, Romantic thought and existentialism (and even many contemporary postmodern or social constructionist viewpoint) share key liberal individualist tenets such as viewing the human self or agent as greatly decontextualized from community and traditions. These approaches lean toward a decidedly liberationist or emancipatory coloring, resulting in a tendency to promote freedom at the price of emotional isolation or emptiness and incurring difficulty in clarifying what ethical obligation is all about in a post-traditional world. In particular with existentialist viewpoints, the standards or grounds for making free choice may remain hidden behind unacknowledged values.

For example, influential modern existentialist views are born of a profound suspicion of social pressures toward conformity and inauthenticity in modern society and often have inspired people who feel trapped or dehumanized in an age given to conformism and scientific determinism. Partly for this reason, numerous modern therapy theories make a version of this ideal of existential freedom central to their picture of human functioning (Richardson, and
Christopher, 1993). An outgrowth of Romantic thought, in part, existentialism tends toward celebrating human creativity as self-justifying and not subject to any higher norm of justice. Thus, in *Being and Nothingness* (1956) Sartre outlines an ontology of human existence which reveals that at our core we are "terrible freedom." Consciousness is the source of all meanings and all reality is a product of our meaning-giving acts. From the existentialist viewpoint, we must repudiate as inauthentic "bad faith" any assumption of pregiven, objective values or obligations in the public world, and we can "invent" the ultimate values and "fundamental project" of our lives as a whole. Moreover, we ought to strive to realize both our own practical freedom and that of all others.

Put this way, existentialism seems to contrast in many ways with the more familiar political versions of liberal individualism which stress human rights and procedural justice. But similarities abound. Both are embroiled in the paradox of advocating a kind of profound neutrality toward all ideals of the good life in order to promote what amounts to their own vision of the good life centered on autonomy or freedom. And both incur similar difficulties in theory and practice. Existential viewpoints can contribute to restoring a sense of our being committed, practical agents in all our activities. But they also greatly obscure the embeddedness of human action and personality in culture and history. As a result, this approach offers no way to articulate the superiority of one way of life over another. It tends to reduce the radical choice of ultimate values to a matter of just registering brute preferences or just plunking for one option over another in a completely arbitrary or random manner (Taylor, 1989). There seems to be no genuine reason to care about my freedom as opposed to, say, the short-term comforts of conformity or blaming others. This view may actually undermine genuine autonomy. Just plunking for one among an indefinite number of possible "optional narratives" for one's life, for example, seems hard to distinguish from making oneself the slave of every passing whim (Guignon, 1986).

**SHARED VALUES AND DIALOGUE**

The communitarian theorist Etzioni (1996) argues that, the commonsense of our age notwithstanding, there can be “excessive liberty.” Without limits on choice, provided first and foremost by some “shared moral convictions,” neither a coherent sense of personal identity nor social peace are really possible. In the view of many libertarians and liberal individualists, “each
person should formulate his or her own virtue, and public policies and mores should reflect only
greements that individuals voluntarily form” (1996: 11). But communitarians and others
(Taylor 1985: 230 ff.) argue that the liberal individualist viewpoint violates its own principle of
purely voluntary agreement about basic values by surreptitiously advancing its own vision of the
good society (respecting neutrality, rights, etc.) and insisting on certain universal moral
obligations (procedural justice). This vision, an odd blend of relativism and dogmatism, could be
seen as both dangerously thin and prone to unravel and all too comfortable with its own claims to
ultimacy. Instead, Etzioni (1996) contends that we have “a need for a much thicker social order. .
. reflecting the fact that all societies promote some shared values. . [which] mobilize some of
their members’ time, assets, energies, and loyalties to the service of one or more common
purposes” (1996: 10).

Such a “thicker” social order is envisioned not as one all-encompassing community, but
as a “community of communities” that is “fully respectful of autonomy” and “largely voluntary.”
Nevertheless, such a society or culture is not taken to be something that primarily is negotiated or
arranged to promote the merely convergent interests or desires of individuals. Etzioni quotes the
political philosopher Ronald Beiner’s assertion that the “central purpose of a society, understood
as a moral community, is not the maximization of autonomy. . . but the cultivation of. . . a variety
of excellences, moral and intellectual” (1992: 14). Beiner also remarks that it is “not that liberal
autonomy is a bad thing, but that without the ‘thick’ attachments provided by the kind of ethos
that builds meaningful character, free choice. . . hardly seems worth the bother” (1992: 37). The
ideals and virtues of such an ethos are not so much agreed upon, which might be out of fear of
punishment or retribution or amount only to temporary contracts based on economic incentives
or other payoffs, as they are believed in, or honored for their own sake.

How do these communitarian thinkers deal with our widespread, characteristic modern
liberal horror of dogmatism, discrimination, oppression, suppression, and/or the curtailing of our
freedom in the name of “shared moral convictions,” however attractive they may be or however
nostalgic we may feel for times gone by when a greater sense of community prevailed? One
way, starting with Tocqueville, is to argue that an atomized, demoralized, cynical body politic is
fertile soil for tyranny, including the all too familiar tyranny of large scale bureaucracies of the
market and the state which, unchecked, turn us into frantic but ultimately passive and other-

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1 Thus, these theorists distinguish their approach from that of many so-called “social conservatives” who are much less hesitant
about imposing their standards, moral order as they view it, on others through law, education, social policy, and military force.
directed cogs in their machinery (Wolf: 1989). This situation may stir greater resentment, leading to discrimination and conflict, and render us more powerless in dealing with them, than more familiar forms of prejudice and injustice that we at least know how to identify and have had some success in beating back. What is needed, then, is not more social reform and the promulgation of more individual rights per se, but the restoration of a more decent and cooperative civil society (Sandel, 1966). Such a society is one in which we are guided less by the fear of legal penalties or economic failure than by what Etzioni (1996) calls “the moral voice,” the voice of conscience, really, or a proper sense of shame about such things as the pornography industry or the chronically debilitating condition of the working poor and their children.

Communitarian thinkers argue that our familiar ways of protecting individual dignity and rights have to supplemented, really enfolded into, what Etzioni calls “dialogues of conviction” about the common good and the good life—hard-nosed, non-violent, often eye-opening and humbling dialogue in which strengthened bonds of trust and mutual respect often are formed even when we agree to disagree. Following Gadamer (1975), Richardson, Rogers, and McCarroll (1998) characterize such dialogue as an interplay between conviction and openness. In this process, only sincere, hard-won convictions about the good and decent life give one the personal strength and motivation (because we really care about their truth) that are needed to be genuinely open to the insights of others, insights that may, and often will, require revision of our most heartfelt views. This never ending process requires the cultivation of virtues like courage, compassion, and humility, just the sort of moral and intellectual excellences Beiner spoke of in the passages quoted above. In their absence, in a society of disconnected individuals “doing their own thing,” with weak ties of loyalty and fellow-feeling, anything other than a relatively shallow life may be hard to come by and the protection of individual rights actually harder to obtain.

LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM AND HATE

The spirited debates between liberals and communitarians over the last few decades focus mainly on delineating the nature of human freedom or liberty and the best circumstances for its flourishing and protection. Should we articulate and encourage somewhat more “thick” notions of character and community or shore up relatively more “thin” liberal principles and procedures? However, it strikes us that this debate could be framed almost as much about the management of
hate as about the promotion of liberty. Liberals share many of the fears and aspirations of those who remember religious wars, ethnic hatred, punishing discrimination, callous oppression, and the like, and can be driven to panic at the thought of our desensitizing ourselves to their continued presence among us and/or allowing more of them to leak back into our way of life. Conservatives, in the present day, tend (much less than they used to) to defend the inherent superiority of their race, religion, or gender. It is hard to get much attention in the political arena today without playing the victim to some extent. Thus, conservatives tend to portray the irresponsible permissiveness and arrogant elitism of liberals as a threat to decent order and a vicious attack on the integrity and survival of their way of life, including genuine freedom. Increasingly vitriolic and violent emotions are let loose at the other side in the argument, often justified by that other side’s preceding attack upon oneself. Those of a communitarian mind set believe they can find something to sympathize with on both sides, and that they have a bead on a genuine third alternative. Be that as it may, they too are mightily concerned to dampen the hatred and violence that undermine liberty and corrode the soul.

We suggest that there is a turbulent emotional underbelly to these debates about freedom, its advancement, and its limits, that there are passions operating beneath the surface of moral and political argument that we ignore at our peril. If they are part of the problem, coping with them will have to be part of the solution. From this point of view, the liberal political philosophy may be seen as a barrier thrown up against aggressions and antipathies, the intensity and volatility of which help explain the somewhat self-defeating extremes to which liberal ideology (for example, the far reaches of “political correctness”) sometimes goes in order to try to protect individuals from intrusion and violation. Also, even if communitarian critics are correct, as Sandel (1996: 6) puts it, that the liberal scheme cannot secure the liberty it promises because it “cannot inspire the sense of community and civic engagement” that even liberty requires, their antidote of “shared moral convictions” may be somewhat tepid medicine for the human propensity to hate. The sensitive and volatile business in which profoundly social human animals badly need and yet resent one another, crave recognition and respect from others and yet feel threatened by dependence on their approval, may need further to be plumbed and charted. It seems to us that current struggles in political philosophy must be seen, in part, as a continuing effort to mollify hate, and that current theorizing about hate and violence must take in to account the particular kind of confusion and blind spots fostered by a pervasive modern liberal ethos. Otherwise,
neither adequate diagnosis nor a reasonably effective cure will be possible. Where might we turn to get a grip on these volatile, all too human dynamics?

RAGE, SHAME, AND THE SOCIAL BOND

There is no better place to start than the vivid and compelling account of hidden shame and rage offered by Thomas Scheff. He has illuminating things to say on this topic throughout his writings, namely in a paper entitled “Deconstructing Rage” (Scheff: 1997), but focuses his ideas sharply in his contribution to this special issue devoted to the subject of hate. Scheff suggests that normal anger is a relatively straightforward process that contains no impediments to full expression of one’s concerns and is unlikely to lead to violence. Bitter hatred and propensity to violence involve an all too common sequence of events beginning with some kind of insult that produces feelings of rejection or inadequacy that are not acknowledged (to others, oneself, or both), followed by a continuing spiral of “intense emotions of shame and anger” (Scheff 1997: 3-4) that is “experienced as hate and rage.” Scheff argues that this spiral of hatred and rage, rather than “expressing and discharging one’s shame,” masks it with rage and aggression. A “loop of unlimited duration and intensity,” in which one may be angry that one is ashamed and ashamed that one is angry, can serve as the “emotional basis of lengthy episodes or even life-long hatred and rage” (Scheff 1997). He suggests that sequences of unacknowledged shame followed by intense hostility can be shown to occur in marital quarrels (Retzinger 1991) and the writings and speeches of Adolf Hitler, and that support can be found for this thesis in the work of Heinz Kohut (1977) and Helen Lynd (1971).

Scheff (1997: 4 ff.) has illuminating things to say, as well, about the development of “intergroup animosity” or hate and violence at the social as well as individual level. One of his suggestions is that a certain condition of “bimodal alienation” may be especially prone to foster violence at the collective level. In this condition, there occurs “isolation” between groups but “engulfment” within them, encouraging one group to scapegoat another and make it the target of hate. “Engulfment” means that group members are “suffocatingly close, to the point that they give up important parts of themselves, in order to belong securely to the group.” Scheff suggests that, in this situation, individuals with an overweening need to belong are likely to feel unaccepted by both foreigners and by others in their own group—leading easily to feelings of rejection, unacknowledged shame and anger. The direction that this shame and resulting hate
takes is typically accompanied by various “techniques of neutralization,” chillingly documented by Scheff, in which one group denies or excuses their own hate and violence and blames and/or dehumanizes their target (Scheff, this issue).

Scheff (1997) caps his analysis of the anger/shame cycle with a most profound meditation on the topic of “apologies.” One of his main recommended responses to belligerence between individuals and groups is what he calls an “apology/forgiveness transaction.” Scheff begins by acknowledging that in Western societies “human interdependency, like shame, is . . . routinely denied.” As a result, “Our public discourse is in the language of individuals, rather than relationships.” He intimates that a desirable or mature “social bond” is “defined in terms of the mix of solidarity and alienation,” but one in which “solidarity prevails” (1997: 11). Therefore, healing through apology begins with acknowledgement of human interdependency. When the bond is threatened, both parties are in “a state of shame,” one for injuring, one for being injured.

A successful apology allows both parties to acknowledge and discharge the shame evoked by the injury. The apology “makes things right” between the parties, both emotionally and cognitively. It repairs the breach in the bond. The success of the action of repair is felt and signaled by both parties; they both feel and display the emotion of pride (1997: 11).

No doubt, this moving account of healing apologies could profitably be expanded and developed in a variety of ways—the nature of the experience involved, its social location and role, the moral logic of it, etc. We need to cultivate and refine what Scheff calls the “bond language” needed to discuss such transactions and values. Let us just mention a couple of issues that it seems to us would be desirable to amplify. First, we need to clarify the nature of the interdependency that Scheff rightly points out we neglect or downplay in our kind of society. He clearly has in mind more profound social and moral ties than the largely contractual, arms-length interplay of “unencumbered” or “liberal” selves in the liberal individualist scheme of things. However, describing them as a “mix of solidarity and alienation,” which sounds like a rather tense compound, might be taken as uncertainty or ambivalence on that point. Also, one wonders whether or not groups that enjoy solidarity necessarily experience what he terms “engulfment.” Presumably not. But then it remains murky how humans might enjoy profound social and moral
connectedness without conformity or domination—a point of serious disagreement among liberals, communitarians, and social conservatives. Sorting out what is possible and desirable in this matter hinges greatly on how we construe this interdependency.

Communitarian theorists and hermeneutic philosophers (Gadamer 1989; Taylor 1989; Richardson et al. 1998), who reason in a similar vein, argue that modern thought and culture portray human agents as much more ontologically distinct and autonomous that they really are. Indeed, in this view, our very identities are constituted by history and culture, rather than radically self-defined and self-possessed. Perhaps the individual is best thought of, in this view, as a “dialogical self” (Bakhtin 1984; Taylor 1991), as an interplay of values and voices that is not particularly unique. It is largely a piece of the running conversation that defines our culture and traditions, but one for which we alone can take responsibility. In Bakhtin’s noted phrase, there is no “alibi for being.” This kind of responsibility, in contrast to individualistic notions of self-responsibility and self-realization, is much more hospitable to the idea of dialogue discussed earlier in this paper. The perspectives of others are both needed and welcome in the pursuit of shared values and common goods, as well as the continued critical shifting of those values and goods. The unique angle of vision and different experience of another largely enriches rather than distracts or detracts from one’s life projects. Whatever the merits of this particular view—much more needs to be said about it to make it plain and deal with objections to it—the fundamental nature of human interdependency is clearly a fateful issue.

A second feature of Scheff’s account of apologies that calls for clarification concerns what kind of cultural values and ethical ideals might make such apology and forgiveness possible, make it of such worth to us that they would be earnestly sought in the face of temptations to hatred, the comforts of resentment, and the safety of alienation. As he describes them, such apology and forgiveness would seem to require considerable maturity, compassion for others, and a considerable capacity for risk-taking and for morally elevated (not pathological) self-effacement. More needs to be said about what sorts of personal and social resources might make such actions more likely to occur?

THE ABOLITION OF SHAME

The urgency of clarifying human interdependency and illuminating the sort of values that might nurture apology and forgiveness can only be heightened by reading the late Christopher
Lasch’s (1995) stunning little essay on “The Abolition of Shame.” Lasch argues that much of psychoanalysis—the mental health profession in general, and a great deal of our culture at large—is headed 180 degrees in the opposite direction from any such “apology/forgiveness transactions.” Here Rieff’s “triumph of the therapeutic” really comes into its own. In its most extreme forms, shame is viewed as only “the vestigial remnant of an outmoded prudery” (1995: 202). It derives from the paternalistic, authoritarian, judgmental, non-accepting attitudes and behavior of parents, other authorities, and society at large. The disappointments and insults of the (many) slings and arrows of an outrageous fortune are attributed to one having been “shamed” or victimized by these hypercritical agencies, whose behavior, in turn, stems from their own experiences of rejection and condemnation earlier in life. The cure, whether it comes from psychotherapy or the programs of the “therapeutic state,” is to boost the “self-esteem” of every individual so that they may find what Gloria Steinem calls a “unique and true self” that resides in each one of us, the discovery and expression of which will set us free (1995: 210).

The goal of this program for living seems to be almost the opposite of the kind of social bonds Scheff encourages. The approach reflects the kind of self-contained, self-sufficient, self-soothing individualism that sharply dichotomizes pride in oneself and concern about the opinions and evaluations of others. It seeks to protect individuals from any and all experiences of debilitating shame much as the political program of liberal individualism seeks to shore up and protect individuals from violations of individual dignity and rights. Thus it comprises a radical form of Erich Fromm’s “freedom from” with no “freedom for.” Lasch argues that this approach to remedying shame is really a kind of “shamelessness.” It represents throwing out the baby with the bath water with a vengeance. It encourages the collapse of all standards that might guide the cultivation of intellectual and moral excellences, “thicker” social bonds, or the capacity for dialogue that requires both substantive convictions about the good life and exquisite sensitivity to the opinions and evaluations of others, which may just have something to offer.

At the other extreme from such shallow cultural trends, Lasch reviews very favorably what he considers to be the “best of the psychoanalytic studies of shame,” provided by Leon Wurmser (1981) in The Mask of Shame. Based on detailed case studies and searching theory, Wurmser interprets the subtle, convoluted, often paradoxical conflicts human shame entails. He finds patients (and humans), for example, to be deeply motivated by both wishes to hide and compulsions to exhibit themselves, “to hide and to spy, to see and be seen” (1981: 200).
Obviously, these struggles bear on the effort of communitarian theorists and others to envision meaningful social bonds characterized by both loyalty and autonomy, being well-known and yet having one’s privacy respected, a capacity for being deeply affected by others but without being dominated or violated by them. Taking the matter deeper, Wurmser, in Lasch’s account, detects a deeper set of paired opposites: the ‘polarity’ between the ‘yearning for boundlessness union’ and a ‘murderous contempt.’ Both arose out of an underlying fear of abandonment…attempts to restore a primal sense of omnipotence can take wither of two forms…to merge symbiotically with the world [or] to become absolutely self-sufficient…

What Wurmser’s patients experience as shameful is the contingency and finitude of human life, nothing less. They cannot reconcile themselves to the intractability of limits…inescapable limitations…become a source of unbearable humiliation, which can express itself in seemingly incompatible ways: in the effort to hide from the world but also in the effort to penetrate its secrets. What these opposites share is a kind of outrage in the face of whatever is mysterious and therefore resistant to human control (1981: 201-202).

Some of the deepest and most taxing parts of the human struggle, moral and existential, are illuminated by Wrumser and Lasch’s account of these dynamics of shame. Lasch drives home the point that attempts to foreshorten the struggle by encouraging a kind of shameless abandonment of standards of excellence not only fails—indeed, it intensifies the vulnerability of the beleaguered modern self—but also encourages a most corrosive kind of cynicism in which one knows, really, that one’s acceptance by others or oneself is hollow and unconvincing.

CONCLUSION

The moral outlook and political program of liberal individualism enshrines precious moral and political ideals, but may be insufficient to support them. Communitarian critics of liberal thought identify aspects of it that make modern individualism significantly self-defeating or self-undermining over the long run, and may have a point that a greater sense of community and “thicker” social ties are required for freedom to be meaningful and to endure. These critics’ ideas about “dialogues of conviction” may go a long way toward answering liberal thinkers
concerns about the full power of communitarian ideas to critique and counter dogmatism and domination.

Still, communitarian notions of dialogue and “shared moral convictions” can seem pallid and incomplete. The full dynamism of the human struggle, including against forces of hatred, rage, and violence, seems somewhat eclipsed in this account. A fuller picture may be drawn by conceiving of modern liberal individualism as not just an effort to shore up freedom, but also as an effort to banish the fearful forces of hatred and violence. This perspective makes the extremes to which it goes in trying to seal individuals off from untoward influences more readily comprehensible, and puts us in a better situation to envision a more adequate response to the enormous challenge of preserving both individual autonomy and meaningful social bonds—both being required to minimize hatred and violence on the human scene.

Christopher Lasch’s discussion of the “abolition of shame” exposes the emotional underbelly of extreme individualism, consisting in more or less desperate attempts to seal oneself off from irrational shame and hate in a secure and lasting way. Also, his analysis of the contorted emotional dynamics of shame puts us in touch with the need for what might be called an new “wisdom of limits,” perhaps an essential means in contending with hate and violence, as best we are able. We suggest that the philosopher Paul Woodruff’s (2001–a, 2001–b) recent rehabilitation of the ancient virtue of “reverence,” an often but not necessarily religious appreciation which involves coming to terms with intractable human limitations, has much to offer in this regard. Woodruff argues that we have oversimplified the matter of shame. In the same way that there is a mean of “just right” respect between the extremes of bare respect between individuals that keep a great distance apart and disdainful authority that willfully or casually crushes other people, there may be a “just right” notion of healthy shame between the poles of amoral or immoral disregard for shared standards and needy or fearful subordination to others. It seems that we are so sensitive to violations of individual autonomy and rights that we often seem to overlook this middle ground. Woodruff remarks that “Shame without reverence undermines autonomy” (2001–b: 8). In other words, a community or authority that does not respect the enduring limitations of its capacities for ethical discernment may quash full independence of judgment among its members, something that in fact it sorely needs in the quest for a good society.

It is our contention that thoughtful and well-intentioned suggestions for understanding
hatred and other types of depersonalization may unintentionally undermine the social bonds that make life worth living. In the rush to stamp out hatred at its core, it is not clear what is being offered beyond a "do no harm" approach, a principle that may in fact perpetuate the kind of alienation and depersonalization that are themselves a major source of hatred and violence in modern society. We suggest that Scheff (this issue) offers an illuminating theoretical understanding of the interplay between shame and hatred while also providing a practical and moral way of acknowledging one's own hatred (thereby strengthening the social bond). Further, we argue that Scheff's account of the importance of the social bond in dealing with hatred is enhanced when viewed from the perspective of communitarian theory. Communitarian thinkers remind us of the fundamental reality of human interdependency we so often overlook. They offer us a glimpse not only of how we might build social bonds from the individual out toward others. At the same time, however, they zero in on the essential role that community and meaningful ties with others plays in fostering the kind of character and values that can minimize hatred and shame in our common life.

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