The Psychology of Hatred and the Role of Early Relationships in Discovering Our True Self

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To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence"[1]

Introduction: Justice and Difference

The search for justice and peace that informed the Ninth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society "Revelation of Justice—Revolution of Love," is of the utmost concern to all. No matter where one turns, questions of justice are prominent, demanding our invested attention and care, challenging us to reach beyond the personal interests, geographical boundaries, and restrictive ideologies that delimit the range of our compassion. Natural disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes bring the ravages of drought and famine, which point out inequities in the distribution of scarce resources across lines of social and economic class, nationality, and race. Clean water, consistent food sources, basic sanitation, and adequate shelter are beyond the reach of millions. Technologies continually push back the frontiers of medicine, while many in the world go without the most basic health care, unable to afford treatment that is assumed by those with means. Genocide, terrorism, and the invasion of countries remind us that our political ideologies and religious beliefs threaten to obscure our shared humanity.

Numerous philosophers have explicated the concept of justice. As the medical ethicists Beauchamp and Childress point out, these various "accounts all interpret justice as fair, equitable, and appropriate treatment in light of what is due or owed to persons. A situation of justice is present whenever persons are due benefits or burdens because of their particular properties or circum-

stances."[2] The principle of formal justice, traditionally attributed to Aristotle, lays out a common, minimal requirement of all subsequent theories of justice. This principle tells us that equals must be treated equally, while unequals may be treated unequally according to relevant differences. However, the theory provides no real guidance in determining the criteria for judging whether two or more individuals are to be considered equals, nor does it state the "particular respects in which equals ought to be treated equally and provides no criteria for determining whether two or more individuals are in fact equals."[3] What the principle of formal justice does, however, is establish the requirement that only those differences that are pertinent to the issue at hand be considered in making decisions. Many instances of justice concern what is known as distributive justice, which "asks on what basis should the goods or services [of society] be proportioned, especially when there are competing demands, and on what basis should the burdens associated with society be distributed."[4] Thus, the decision to distribute scarce medical resources on the basis of irrelevant attributes, such as a patient's race or gender, would be judged unethical.

The Western ethical tradition is firmly grounded upon considerations of justice and respect for the autonomy of individuals to make decisions regarding their well-being. Together these principles exert a pervasive influence not only on the actual choices that are made in the interest of pursuing one's self-interest, but also on the recognition of ethical concerns in the first place. Common use of the concept of "autonomy," which refers both to an ethical principle as well as to a theory of developmental growth and maturation, promotes a sense of intellectual "fuzziness" that somehow equates personal well-being with independence and individualism. In contrast, autonomous choice in the ethical realm refers to the ability to make decisions regarding one's well-being that are free of controlling or coercive influences. Autonomy as a goal of personal development has been highly valued in the prevailing intellectual paradigm of the West, such that our understanding of what constitutes "well-being" and the "person" have both been shaped by an overemphasis upon the individual apart from the interactive, contextual nature of persons. And yet there is increasing evidence to suggest that our largely uncritical acceptance of the primacy of the autonomous, independent individual may be based upon fundamentally erroneous assumptions regarding the nature of reality. How we understand the very notion of

equals may represent the misleading influence of our usual sensory perceptions, rather than reflection upon an underlying, substantial reality.

Interactive Reality and the Interdependent Self

I recall spending long summer evenings lying on the cool grass as a young child of eight or nine. My closest childhood friend and I would watch the green bottleflies and listen to the crickets and the wind rustling the leaves, discussing our hopes for the future, such as possible careers, where we would live, and various other topics called forth from the seemingly limitless potential of life. And we would gaze out into the infinity of forever. I clearly remember trying to wrap my mind around the concept of infinite space and a universe without boundaries, of timelessness without beginning or end. Besides ending up with that unique sort of headache that occurs when the two hemispheres of one's brain seem to slide past one another when confronted with the irreconcilable—and then don't quite re-align—I remember coming to the conclusion that either there had to be a Divine Being, or else we were the objects of the cruelest joke imaginable, in which case there was at least an omnipotent malevolent force in the universe. The sense of great potential cast against the backdrop of infinity was an overriding, almost palpable presence at those times. We both felt incredibly small, insignificant, and yet at the same time energized and enlivened with the possibilities that life presented.

I relate this personal story now not because it is unique, but rather because I believe that this experience delimits the parameters of much of what I hope to convey in this article. The awareness of our absolute contingent nature, the beginnings of our individual lives in the unknown past, our deaths in the unknowable future, and our essential aloneness are in fact intertwined and interpenetrating questions that are posed in each of us. The choices that we live out in response to them are our attempts to realize and to know our true nature and unique personal identities. Ultimately, these choices not only allow us to know ourselves, but to be known by others, in an unfolding dialectic of becoming.

As a psychologist specializing in treating children and youth who have suffered chronic, often severe relational trauma, what has become clear to me is that the very possibility of authoring a coherent response to the question of life arises out of our relation-

ships. Purpose and meaning throughout the course of life is a matter of sustaining community with other invested persons, just as healing from trauma requires their responsive presence. It is the earliest attachments between children and their caregivers that serve in many ways as models for later relationships, guiding expectations that subtly shape our views of others as well as of ourselves. Luckily, parents are not required to be unerringly aware of and completely responsive to their child's needs in order to promote healthy growth and development. When those entrusted with a child's care are not overwhelmed by their own unmet needs or circumstances, these emotional ties provide a "good enough" interpersonal environment which fosters security, safety, comfort, and closeness, as well as the ability to tolerate and manage life's frustrations and disappointments. From such a relational foundation the growing child is empowered to explore the world and discover her own interests, abilities and successes.

Given this vantage point, which understands that the division between the "psychological" and the "social" is more apparent than substantial, I want to suggest that the promotion of peace and justice in our world lies in understanding and fostering the formative power of these critical early relationships. To overcome the external distractions and apparent differences that divide our world, we must appreciate the psychological, developmental, and spiritual significance of what Merton meant when he wrote that "The conditions of our world are simply an outward expression of our own thoughts and desires."[5] Or, again, as he reminds us, a "man who lives in division" and "is not a person but only an 'individual.' . . . The man who lives in division is living in death. He cannot find himself because he is lost; he has ceased to be a reality."[6] In a contextual, communal view of the self, one that seeks to integrate and indeed transcend both the inner and outer realities of experience, how might we understand this assertion? What types of thoughts and desires is Merton referring to here? How do they develop, and how might we seek to alter the conditions of our own lives, the lives of our families, friends, those we work alongside, and those we know only from afar? How do we take this insight and leverage it to achieve the ideal of peace and justice?

Developmental biology, neurochemistry, various fields within psychology, including feminist, constructivist, and multicultural thought, as well as the study of trauma, present a portrait of human growth which highlights our essential interdependence. This

emerging understanding, following the course set by modern physics, challenges the notion of an independently existing self, of a reality that can be objectively grasped beyond the active, constructive efforts of the knower to bring meaning to phenomena. Gary Zukav, writing almost thirty years ago in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* of the history of our understanding of the nature of light, explains this fundamental quality of reality as leading "to the conclusion that the world consists not of things, but of interactions. Properties belong to interactions, not to independently existing things, like 'light.'"[7] Since that time physics has consistently demonstrated that the interactive nature of phenomena points to a reality that frequently contradicts our usual sense perceptions, which conveniently simplify and separate the world into discrete objects and events.

Numerous investigations support the critical importance of the earliest interactions between infant and caregiver in forming the biological basis, the complex pathways of neurons in the developing brain, of the nascent sense of self. What we are learning is that these relationships influence "every aspect of . . . internal and external functioning throughout the lifespan."[8] The critical role assumed by others in facilitating the development of the capacity to regulate our feelings and behaviors, develop a basic trust in the world, and fashion a stable and coherent sense of self provides the psychological foundation for later developmental tasks. The dialectic relationship between the "conditions of our world" and the "thoughts and desires" to which Merton refers find their beginning in our attachment relationships, for it is here that inner and outer realities intermingle; it is here that our subjective experience of our selves, of others and of our place in the relational world first finds expression. If we are to fully appreciate their significance, we must realize that, as psychologist James Garbarino has so eloquently stated

> there is no such thing as 'a baby;' there is only 'a baby in relation to someone else.' An infant cannot survive psychologically and spiritually on its own. To begin the process of human development, a child needs not so much stimulation as responsiveness; children need to make connection through entering into a relationship.[9]

From an Eastern spiritual and philosophical context, the Dalai Lama approaches this same phenomenal aspect of the self through reference to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, or *ten del*, which suggests that "our habitual notion of self is in some sense a label for a complex web of interrelated phenomena."[10]

Love and Hate as Ways of Knowing

In order to realize justice, we must come to terms with one of the more disturbing aspects of our human nature. We must examine the psychology of hate. While hate is not always associated with aggression and violence, it plays a critical role in the continuing acts of inhumanity that mark our world. Without an adequate grasp of this basic phenomenon, our ability to understand and alter those conditions threatening the viability of society is necessarily limited.

Against the backdrop of our essential human aloneness, the fundamental question of life itself is uttered anew in each of us. Both love and hate are epistemologies, ways in which we seek to answer this question, and therefore know the nature of reality, including our own selves and other persons. This search for knowledge is the basic human response to the dilemma posed by existence. Erich Fromm expresses the essence of this challenge when he reminds us, "the question is: How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which the experience of separateness creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellowman, with nature."[11] According to Fromm, while the question which each of us must in some manner answer in living our lives is always thus reducible, there are only two basic answers:

> One is to overcome separateness and to find unity by *regression* to the state of unity which existed before man was born. The other answer is to be *fully born*, to develop one's awareness, one's reason, one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement, and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.[12]

Merton, like Fromm, sees but two inherent possibilities to life's question. He writes in *New Seeds of Contemplation* that "There are two things which men can do about the pain of disunion with other men. They can love or they can hate."[13] The question of life

affords no other choice. Through our encounters with the Divine that flow out of the call to love, we overcome "the prison of one's separateness"[14] and achieve a unity which transcends this aloneness. This response is one of a radical freedom arising out of personal responsibility for owning our response to the dilemma of separation, and which openly embraces the anxious contingency of life.

The awareness of separation, incompleteness, and aloneness also brings a hunger for transcendence, for becoming more than what we are when born. This transcendence, writes Erich Fromm, is

> one of the most basic needs of man, rooted in the fact of his self-awareness, in the fact that he is not satisfied with the role of creature, that he cannot accept himself as dice thrown out of the cup. He needs to feel as the creator, as one transcending the passive role of being created.[15]

For Merton, this same innate tendency is captured in the following: "Our vocation is not simply to *be*, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny."[16] Several paragraphs later he writes *"The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God's will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity."*[17] How do we nurture these seeds? What are the requisite conditions that will allow them to break forth from the earth following their long repose beneath winter's snow, finally to reach the warmth of the sun?

The other "answer"—that offered by hate—is in some respects both compelling and comforting in its simplicity, offering reassurance and distraction through a denial of the dependent nature of human beings. This response turns away from awareness of our existential aloneness, and instead seeks comfort and solace in a "craving for certainty,"[18] and an absolute control over life. In this quest the other is effectively excluded from the self, resulting in a greatly impoverished self. Hatred simplifies the world of the one who hates, reducing the rich ambiguity inherent within the diversity of human experience to simple, dichotomous categories, leaving no "psychological space" available for another's subjectivity. Hatred is blind to the essential truth that Garbarino speaks to in the words quoted above, namely that we are all called into being

only "in relation to someone else." In the response of hate we abdicate personal responsibility for daring to reach beyond separateness to the recognition that we are all already one, and that it is only through the continual revelation of the Divine through creation that we *are* at all.

People often "nurse" their hatred, which in turn dominates and consumes the person who hates. The experience of carefully stoking one's hatred with the kindling of real and imagined injustices, together with fantasies of revenge upon one's perpetrators, is commonplace. Although promising comfort, solace, continuity, and organization of experience, the ultimate cost of hate is the forfeiture of genuine human freedom. Inevitably, as Alford points out, "In hatred one transforms interpersonal bonds into bondage and relationships into prisons."[19] The hated other, despised for representing, withholding, or threatening to take that which is needed or desired, for causing unjust pain and suffering, or for pointing out feared unworthiness and precipitating the experience of shame and humiliation, nonetheless provides the one who hates with an organizing sense of meaning and purpose.

Hatred is born of anxiety, fear, and vulnerability. It is dominated by a myopic, obsessive focus, as the person who hates locates within another that which they secretly believe they lack – an elusive gift that has somehow been denied them. Feelings of envy and the fear of being revealed as unworthy of love and acceptance compel the person to action, in the vain hope of overcoming perceived faults and insufficiencies. Such attempts to "win" a sense of adequacy through force of will and individual effort lead only to further feelings of lack and separation, as the feared alienation from others that initially gives rise to hate grows stronger. The person who hates is thus tightly bound to the hated one, at the enormous cost of the loss of personal freedom. Merton describes this bondage as

> hell . . . where no one has anything in common with anybody else except the fact that they all hate one another and cannot get away from one another and from themselves . . . . And the reason why they want to be free of one another is not so much that they hate what they see in others, as that they know others hate what they see in them: and all recognize in one another what they detest in themselves, selfishness, and impotence, agony, terror and despair.[20]

The recognition that we each struggle in our own manner with the feelings that Merton presents here removes hate from the realm of the exceptional or the abnormal, and emphasizes our ability to hate as well as to love one another. It is not only the mass murderer, rapist, or leader of a genocide who is capable of hate, but each of us.

C. Fred Alford, in a penetrating analysis of the dynamics of hate, points out that the experience of merger with another that characterizes hatred functions to calm, soothe, and reassure the one who hates that they are not alone; it seeks as well to appropriate the hated other, to "become what otherness knows—or is."[21] Hatred hides in the false security of a state of merger which seeks to obliterate those external differences which emphasize our apparent separation and disconnection. The experience of merger that defines hatred involves the temporary loss of personal boundaries and our usual self-other distinctions. It confuses possession and control with communion, and objectifies both the one who hates and the one who is hated. In Alford's view, hate is an avoidance and denial of life itself, masquerading as intimacy. In a primitive way, hatred, whether of a person or a group, by providing the experience of merger, is in some distorted way relational in nature. Alford's chapter, "Hate is the Imitation of Love," explores in depth this relational aspect, reminding the reader that a more accurate appreciation of hate understands it as a grotesque distortion or imitation of love, which ultimately "corrodes the ego, wearing away the self,"[22] leaving one "empty," and "depleted." Hate is not the opposite of love; instead "hatred comes frighteningly close to love."[23]

While hatred seeks knowledge of the other through control and possession, love seeks to know and to be known in return. This distinction is critical to understanding the relationship between hatred and love, as it is only through risking being genuinely and intimately known by another that we transcend the illusory sense of radical autonomy and aloneness provided by our ordinary sensory experiences. These common perceptions readily mislead us into viewing personal adequacy as dependent upon our individual efforts at meeting basic material, psychological, and spiritual needs. And the belief in the independent existence of objects—including persons—leads quite naturally to the fear that there is only a limited supply of the "good stuff" that we need in order to feel adequate and complete. Self-worth operates within a

model of economic scarcity, where "market forces" determine our relative value.

In response to human needs for "a positive identity, the need for feelings of effectiveness and control over important events, the need for positive connection to other human beings, and the need for autonomy,"[24] the call to love is a call to transcendence. Only love recognizes the spurious nature of questions of personal adequacy, of our fears over having our basic needs met, of being worthy of attentive care. Love understands that what is needed for the realization of our true identities is already present within us as a human organism, as the communal Body of Christ here on earth. As Merton expresses this idea,

> because God's love is in me, it can come to you from a different and special direction that would be closed if He did not live in me, and because His love is in you, it can come to me from a quarter from which it would not otherwise come.[25]

In responding to the call to love, we find that it is through connection, through interaction with all of reality, that the true self emerges. Writing in *Disputed Questions*, Merton addresses love as the ultimate context and ground of our being, highlighting its ability to bridge the isolation and separateness so integrally tied to the human condition:

> By love man enters into contact first with his own deepest self, then with his brother, who is his other self, and finally with the wisdom and power of God, the ultimate Reality . . . . Because it is love it is able to bridge the gap between subject and object and *commune in the subjectivity of the one loved*."[26]

The Relational Nature of Hate

Just as love defies ready understanding, there is no single, commonly accepted definition of hate. A dictionary entry for of hate is "1. to dislike intensely or passionately; feel extreme aversion for or extreme hostility toward."[27] In common usage, people speak of hate in many ways: "I really hated her when she left me for another man." "I hate myself when I act like that." "I hate chicken liver." "I hate the way that the government treats the elderly, or the poor, or gays, or the homeless." "I hate people who gossip

about others." "I hate the weather today." "I hate the Yankees." "I hate rap music."

The causes of human aggression and violence are multifaceted and interactive. Social, historical, economic, and political factors, various conflicting ideals, including those of technological progress, religious beliefs, and even personal interests such as the advancement of one's career, may all intersect in the genesis of violence. People may feel intense, even homicidal hatred for another and not engage in acts of violence. They may also engage in acts of violence without experiencing hatred.

My purpose here is not to survey all of the major conceptualizations of hate, nor to arrive at a consensus definition, but rather to explore the relational origins of hate, to understand how the earliest relationships with caregivers can plant the seeds of rage, aggression and hatred. Various usages of hate over the centuries have emphasized either intense negative feelings or an enduring attitude toward another who is the object of one's hatred. The behavioral component of hate has also been understood in several ways, with some authors speaking of withdrawal and others of attack as characteristic of hate. From a psychological perspective, Baumeister and Butz offer a representative definition of hate as "a stable emotional pattern marked by severely negative feelings toward some person or group."[28] As Royzman, McCauley and Rozin[29] explain hate can be seen as comprised of both anger and fear, where the object of one's hatred "not only is blamed for some past maltreatment of oneself or someone one cares about but is also recognized as a source of future threat."[30] The notion of threat is central to many theories of hate, speaking to a continuing vulnerability of the self in the face of a future that holds no certainty of attaining either continuity or coherence.

Robert Sternberg proposes a complex theory of seven different types of hate that draws upon various combinations of three main components: 1) the negation of intimacy or distancing from the object of one's hatred, which may be motivated by feelings of disgust or revulsion; 2) passion in hate, which is expressed as either intense fear or anger in response to a threat; 3) decision-commitment, which involves cognitions of devaluation and diminution through contempt.[31, 32] Sternberg's theory is relevant to understanding hate in both individuals and groups. The relational aspects of hate are prominent in Sternberg's theory, and like Alford,

he proposes that hate is psychologically related to love, representing neither the opposite nor the absence of love.[33]

The relational qualities of hate are important to keep in mind, especially in the current age. Technological developments provide highly efficient means of killing one another, often across great distances. We are able to witness death and devastation as it occurs, which adds to the seemingly impersonal nature of violence in our world, where videogames imitate life and life itself becomes increasingly surreal. As Merton comments, "Instead of understanding death, it would seem that our world simply multiplies it. Death becomes a huge, inscrutable *quantity*."[34] However, as Alford emphasizes, even in such a situation, given both our proclivity for projecting disavowed aspects of ourselves onto others, as well as our ability for identifying with the suffering of others, "most violence has the quality of attachment,"[35] meaning that it involves relationship of one form or another.

At its core hate incorporates an intensely negative view of the object of one's hatred, whether a person, group, or even a nation. It is grounded in the human tendency to differentiate between *us* and *them*, and further, to devalue *them*. Cognitively, humans are well adapted to noticing differences in the world around them, and assigning value to these differences according to their utility in making the countless decisions that life requires. Human consciousness—with its exquisite awareness of separation and difference—can rather easily mislead us into equating the external distractions of life, such as the pursuit of power, wealth, or status, with our basic adequacy and worth. Personal worth then becomes elusive and illusory, shifting with the changing fortunes in our life circumstances. In the extreme this desperate grasping after personal worth can drive one to a violent "taking" of the other. Whether our differences are understood as proof of an essential alienation from others—thereby announcing the impossibility of union—or as ways in which we serve to complement and complete one another is of fundamental concern. Do we cherish our differences as a source of rich diversity, or do we feel threatened by them? How each of us responds to human difference may be profoundly influenced by the relationships we establish in the first years of life. Examining these may illuminate possible motivations for devaluing the other, as well as insight into the purpose that such devaluation serves.

Intense devaluation of the other, while not identical with hate, constitutes "an essential ground out of which hate can grow."[36] It is this extreme differentiation of self and other which ultimately serves as the prerequisite for the dehumanization and objectification that makes violence against self or other possible. And it is this imposition of an "alien-otherness" on other persons that makes them somehow so different from the one who hates that they

> can be seen as expendable, undeserving nonentities who are eligible targets of exploitation (e.g., illegal immigrants, animals), or they can be seen as evil enemies who are eligible targets of violence. Whether nonentities or enemies, those outside the scope of justice are morally excluded and seen as less than human.[37]

Once another person is removed from the realm of moral concern, the possibility of actions of an aggressive or violent nature is greatly increased. It is simply not possible for one human being to murder another person. In order to kill someone it is first necessary to objectify that person, to utterly ignore their indwelling Divinity so as to reduce them to the category of some thing that can then be annihilated. However, it is also true that the extent to which someone objectifies another person reflects the degree to which they themselves have become objects to themselves. The American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan captured the foundation for this observation in a basic psychological principle:

> If there is a valid and real attitude toward the self, that attitude will manifest as valid and real toward others. It is not that as ye judge so shall ye be judged, but as you judge yourself so shall you judge others; strange but true so far as I know, and with no exceptions.[38]

The Call to Unity

In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton draws his readers' attention to the possibilities for the co-creation of our identities contained within our deepest feelings of aloneness, unworthiness, and insufficiency: "There is in every weak, lost and isolated member of the human race an agony of hatred born of his own helplessness, his own isolation. Hatred is the sign and the expression of loneliness, of unworthiness, of insufficiency."[39] This "rankling, torment-

ing sense of unworthiness that lies at the root of all hate"[40] paradoxically contains within it the seeds of love and of our true identities. It is precisely here, in convincing us that our weaknesses and wounds make us unworthy, that hatred pulls its sleight-of-hand, substituting the illusion of self-sufficiency for a compassionate appreciation of how our woundedness serves to call forth that which is vital, generative, and healing in other persons. Writing in *Love and Living*, Merton poignantly expresses the corrective experience that allows us to see through the illusion of inadequacy and separation:

> I cannot find myself in myself, but only in another. My true meaning and worth are shown to me not in my estimate of myself, but in the eyes of the one who loves me; and that one must love me as I am, with my faults and limitations, revealing to me the truth that these faults and limitations cannot destroy my worth in *their* eyes; and that I am therefore valuable as a person, in spite of my shortcomings, in spite of the imperfections of my exterior 'package.'[41]

Love, in contrast, is a letting go of control and order, which is something that the person who is consumed by hate cannot risk. While hatred seeks to violently wrest away that which it craves from another person, love understands, however obscurely, that such attempts ultimately do violence to both self and other. Genuine human existence requires the courage to realize the freedom that is inherent in each unfolding moment. It embraces the discovery of self that is found only in the affirmation of the essential oneness of all persons. The courage to honestly confront the "now," without reliance upon the various diversions that we so often employ, depends upon a deep sense of trust, and a faith that grasps that the question of our worthiness is a non-question. It is this "faith that one is loved by God although unworthy – or, rather, irrespective of one's worth"[42] that is the ground out of which our true identity emerges.

The person who loves has learned the lesson of compassion, that "my brother and I are one. That if I love my brother, then my love benefits my own life as well, and if I hate my brother and seek to destroy him, I destroy myself also."[43] Love sees beyond the illusion of control, and realizes that it is through the renunciation of attempts to control others that we are freed from the prison

of our apparent separation. It grasps the truth that, so long as we draw arbitrary boundaries between self and other based upon our common sensory perceptions, we ignore our communal human existence, and turn our backs on that union with the Divine which is our birthright. This is the true "secret" of humanity, which Merton referenced in a discussion of Sufism during his Alaska visit of 1968:

> The secret of man is God's secret; therefore, it is in God. My secret is God's innermost knowledge of me, which He alone possesses. It is God's secret knowledge of myself in Him . . . . it is the secret of man in God himself.[44]

Merton goes on to speak of the unqualified "yes" that is the affirmation of our identity. "My destiny in life—my final integration—is to uncover this 'yes' so that my life is totally and completely a 'yes' to God, a complete assent to God."[45] This affirmation is an act of faith, and an opening of our own truest identity through a receptivity which acknowledges the interpenetration of God and each member of the human community.

Infant Attachment and the Genesis of Mind

As discussed above, the insidious sense of depletion, emptiness, insufficiency, and abandonment that characterizes the self that hates is a key to understanding both the origin and function of human hatred. These are many of the same descriptors used to describe infants and young children who have known chronic relational trauma, such as physical or sexual abuse and neglect. Interactions that are inconsistent, intrusive, punitive, neglectful, withdrawing, or withholding may all contribute to overwhelming the infant's fragile coping responses. Messages regarding the infant's essential worth and "knowability" are communicated through these interactions and incorporated into the early developing sense of self. The pull toward despair, helplessness and hopelessness may be strong in an infant who has experienced this profound lack of attunement. In extreme cases, where their increasingly more frantic efforts at eliciting caregiver attention consistently fail, infants have been observed to literally "give up" and surrender the will to live.

In an oft-quoted passage from *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton reminds us:

> At the root of all war is fear: not so much the fear men have of one another as the fear they have of *everything*. It is not merely that they do not trust one another; they do not even trust themselves . . . . It is not only our hatred of others that is dangerous but also and above all our hatred of ourselves: particularly that hatred of ourselves which is too deep and too powerful to be consciously faced. For it is this which makes us see our own evil in others and unable to see it in ourselves.[46]

In these lines we see several of the developmental antecedents of hatred, qualities that arise in our earliest relationships. In particular, Merton references "our hatred of ourselves," an intensely personal experience of shame and humiliation often acquired at an age before readily accessible verbal memories are available, and which may be "too deep and too powerful to be consciously faced." The interactions that produce these intense feelings often involve inconsistent, rejecting or ridiculing primary caregiver responses to the young child, which lead to the development of the child's view of herself as unworthy of help and undeserving of comfort.[47] Such experiences may give rise to cognitive schema, or ways of organizing one's understanding of self in relation to others, that unconsciously lead to actions that produce the feared rejection and thereby reinforce the belief in the self as unworthy, flawed, or perhaps damaged.

The newborn infant is unable to regulate her internal affective state, and is almost completely dependent upon the ongoing physical presence and empathic responsiveness of the caregiver for these functions; she cannot calm or soothe herself when anxious, sad, or angry, nor can she restore her inner equilibrium when overly excited. She cannot stimulate herself when she is essentially "bored." As straightforward as it is challenging, "the essential task of the first year of human life is the creation of a secure attachment bond of emotional communication between the infant and primary caregiver,"[48] which serves as the foundation for later development. The accurate differentiation of internal and external experiences, the growth of a richer, more finely-nuanced subjective experience, the exploration of objects in the environment, the attainment of an ever-greater sense of personal autonomy and competence—all of these developmental tasks are contingent upon the physical and psychological availability of the caregiver.

It is the infant's inherent, unarticulated potentialities for meaning that the sensitive caregiver must accurately recognize in order to internalize a sense of her subjective experience as worthy of others' attentive care. From out of this dynamic rhythm of mutual emotional responsiveness and influence, the infant learns to trust in the predictability and safety of the world. Quite literally, we now understand that the caregiver is intimately involved from birth in the development of the child's brain structure and chemistry—the caregiving other is embedded in the self from the moment of birth. The genesis of mind is itself entirely dependent upon the provision of meaningful experience and occurs only within the context of relationships with other human minds. The very continuity and coherence of the self across time relies upon the consistent availability and responsiveness of this relationship, and therefore represents a life-and-death concern for the infant and young child. I believe that this is the same phenomenon that Merton was referring to when he wrote:

> the deep "I" of the spirit, of solitude and of love, cannot be "had," possessed, developed, perfected . . . . This inner "I," who is always alone, is always universal: for in this most inmost "I" my own solitude meets the solitude of every other man and the solitude of God. Hence it is beyond division, beyond limitation, beyond selfish affirmation.[49]

It is through sustaining caregiving relationships that we first learn about and discover ourselves—only through knowing and being accurately known by the caregiver do we know ourselves. This is a basic need for human beings, what Daniel Stern calls "an intersubjective need to be understood."[50] John Bowlby, who developed the attachment paradigm, referred to these dynamics as "reciprocal interchange."[51] Alan Schore writes of this relational phenomenon, emphasizing that the sensitive caregiver is "psychobiologically attuned not so much to the child's overt behavior as to the reflections of his/her internal state."[52] Out of these earliest interactions, the child also develops the ability to distinguish between internal emotional states and self from non-self; begins to integrate experiences across past and present, and into the future; evaluates subjective experience in ways that guide behavior; develops skills of social adjustment; learns control of mood, drive and responsibility; gains the capacity to cope with emotional

stressors; and learns to understand the emotional states of other persons, which is the precursor of empathy.[53] This latter skill, the ability to take the perspective of another and understand their subjective experience *as it means for them*, is necessary for the attainment of mutuality or reciprocity in relationships, and thus opens up the very possibility of social life through the growth of the capacity for empathy. This interactive, dialectical process, in which caregiver and infant mutually influence one another in a joyful dance of becoming, is beautifully captured in Merton's words:

> Because God's love is in me, it can come to you from a different and special direction that would be closed if He did not live in me, and because His love is in you, it can come to me from a quarter from which it would not otherwise come.[54]

Love as the Way to Justice

Reflecting upon Merton's thoughts on the nature of love and hate, I have attempted to integrate a working sense of what Merton is saying from a spiritual perspective with what I have learned from the perspective of clinical and developmental psychology. Merton's discussion of hate calls us to empathically approach the rageful protest of a spirit that is faced with the threat of dissolution and fragmentation, and which is fighting against annihilation. When Merton speaks of "the rankling, tormenting sense of unworthiness that lies at the root of all hate,"[55] he is acknowledging our need for unconditional love and acceptance, as well as the spiritual reality that, left to our own, we are incapable of earning love. Love, properly understood, cannot be deserved, and in fact it is only because of our wounds, faults and failings that we are lovable at all. It is only our incompleteness that calls forth from others the fullness of their gifts and potentiality for being, which in turn complement and complete us.

Merton's reminder of the sense of unworthiness that torments each member of the human race points out the seductive nature of human hatred, which would have us believe the evidence of our senses and usual experience of self and other. Hatred convinces us that our shortcomings, brokenness and wounds are evidence of insufficiency rather than pointing beyond these superficial differences to our basic union with one another. In addition to this,

he is directing our attention (perhaps unknowingly) to those earliest relationships with parents and other caregivers, who are blessed with the opportunity to participate in the co-creation of the child's developing sense of self. When Merton writes in the introduction to the Vietnamese edition of *No Man Is An Island* that, in order for peace to be possible in our world, it is imperative that we "recognize that our being itself is grounded in love: that is to say that we come into being because we are loved and because we are meant to love others,"[56] he is addressing not only the sustaining love of the Divine, but a core psychological truth as well. The realization of our potential as caring, productive human beings is dependent upon our ability (and, at times, the good fortune of circumstance) to enlist invested others who join our efforts at bringing coherence and meaning to experience. As Robert Kegan pointed out some twenty years ago

> Who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes. Who comes into a person's life is in part a matter of luck, in part a matter of one's power to recruit others, but in large part a matter of other people's ability to be recruited . . . . however much we learn about the effort to be of help, we can never protect ourselves from the risks of caring . . . In running these risks we preserve the connections between us. We enhance the life we share, or perhaps better put, we enhance the life that shares us.[57]

The larger interpersonal context in which we discover our true identities is defining of what it means to be human, and when we grasp this we are challenged to view the "other" in an inclusive, encompassing manner, considering their welfare as integrally connected with our own. Justice considerations become radically altered when the scope of our ethical concern is thus expanded. The obligation to treat equals as equals as the foundation of acting justly becomes transformed, as our usual distinctions between self and other lose their familiar boundaries. We are challenged to love both self and other, to embrace the division and conflict that divides us from one another. We must genuinely encounter the complexity, ambiguity, and interdependent nature of humanity, before finally grasping the spiritual reality that "we do not exist for ourselves alone, and it is only when we are fully convinced of this fact that we begin to love ourselves properly and thus also love others."[58]

The person whose village has been swept away by a tsunami, the earthquake victim facing the oncoming winter without adequate shelter, the person whose country is being torn apart by genocide, the starving child who may not see tomorrow, the person who continues to experience economic discrimination on the basis of gender or the color of her skin, the African victim of AIDS whose plight is ignored by those nations with the means to ease her suffering, and the Sunni Muslim who rages against the invasion of his country are all, "members of a race which is intended to be one organism and 'one body.'"[59]

Merton demonstrates throughout his works a deep belief in the role of the Divine and other persons in the working out of our true identity. While not trained formally as a psychologist, Merton develops a highly sophisticated understanding of the self that anticipated many current developments in psychology. His writings on spirituality and contemplation in particular contain within them lines of thought more recently found within the interpersonal, multicultural, and constructivist perspectives. Merton and these contemporary scholars of the self consistently challenge the notion of the independently existing, autonomous individual. While the language employed by Merton and others, such as Alan Schore, to describe the development of the self may show considerable variation, the description of the self that emerges is one that emphasizes the central importance of our relationships and the interdependence that informs our search for identity and meaning.

Both love and hate are in this respect a response to the question that life poses in each of us, just as each are epistemologies that embody a fundamental relational stance that defines self and other. One answer frees both self and other to realize the freedom that comes with full personhood, while the other restricts, confines, and ultimately imprisons us in our efforts at fleeing the anxious awareness of separation. In this regard Merton's words from *The Inner Experience* challenge us to consider as matters of ultimate concern the implications of these ways of knowing, as he reminds his reader that one's "inner self is, in fact, inseparable from Christ and hence it is in a mysterious and unique way inseparable from all the other 'I's' who live in Christ, so that they all form one 'Mystical Person' which is 'Christ.'"[60]

Against this understanding of the self, questions of justice become radically transformed. The original revolutionary and transcendent qualities of Christ's message of love calls forth from each

of us the response of love and compassion. Our ethics is itself challenged and transformed. Rather than focusing intently on identifying distinct characteristics for determining relevant issues of who is to be considered an "equal" in any given situation, we are drawn instead to the unmistakable conclusion that we are all equals, and that "Every other man is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of mankind .... What I do is also done for them and with them and by them .... [M]y life represents my own allotment in the life of a whole supernatural organism to which I belong."[61]

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