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**THE
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CASE OF
DONALD
TRUMP**

27 PSYCHIATRISTS AND MENTAL
HEALTH EXPERTS ASSESS A PRESIDENT

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WHO GOES TRUMP?

Tyranny as a Triumph of Narcissism

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Tyrannies are three-legged beasts. They encroach upon our world in a steady creep more often than overcome it in a violent takeover, which may be one reason they are not always easy to spot before it is too late to do much about them. Their necessary components, those three wobbly legs, are: the tyrant, his supporters (the people), and the society at large that provides a ripe ground for the collusion between them. Political scientists call it “the toxic triangle” (Hughes 2017).

The force binding all three is narcissism. It animates the beast while, paradoxically and not, eating it alive, bringing its downfall in due time. This force and its influences, which knit the beast into such a powerful and destructive entity, remain invisible to us for reasons that are clearly hinted at but somehow continue to evade our individual and collective comprehension. They make sure we don't recognize the tyranny's marching boots, which can be heard from miles away and months away, until they show up on our doorstep, and that's despite the fact that this very same process has repeated itself countless times in history.

We have known who tyrants are and how tyrannies form since antiquity, and this knowledge has been supported by the ever-growing tragic evidence of the tyrannies' effects on humanity. Yet, despite making promises to ourselves and

one another to “Never forget,” we seem not to remember or not to know, always with devastating consequences. Our forgetting stems partly from miseducation (Giroux 2014) and partly from denial. It gives us clues to the kind of work (psychological, social, political, and economic) that we must do if we are to avoid the self-destruction promised by tyrannies today.

Let’s take a look at tyranny’s components and their interactions.

The Tyrant

Tyrants come in different shapes and sizes, and depending on perspective, various writers stress similarities or differences among them (Newell 2016). This paper will not delve into those classifications but, rather, attempt to simplify and maybe even illuminate their most salient common features.

Although the terms *dictator* and *tyrant* are used interchangeably, it makes sense perhaps to stress that not all dictators are tyrants. Tyrants are dictators gone bad. A leader may start as a seemingly benevolent dictator but turn into a tyrant as his reign progresses, becoming ruthlessly destructive with time, something we have seen repeatedly in history.

All tyrants share several essential features: they are predominantly men with a specific character defect, narcissistic psychopathy (a.k.a. malignant narcissism). This defect manifests in a severely impaired or absent conscience and an insatiable drive for power and adulation that masks the conscience deficits. It forms the core of attraction between him and his followers, the essence of what is seen as his “charisma.” In his seminal paper on “Antisocial Personality Disorder and Pathological Narcissism in Prolonged Conflicts and Wars of the 21st Century” (2015), Frederick Burkle observes that narcissism augments and intensifies the pathological features of a psychopathic character structure, making those endowed with it especially dangerous, not in the least because of their ability to use manipulative charm and a pretense of human ideals to pursue their distinctly primitive goals. We talk about the chief feature of narcissistic

psychopathy, the impairment of conscience, and its destructive consequences in “The Unbearable Lightness of Being a Narcissist” (Mika and Burkle 2016).

Impulsive, sensation-seeking, and incapable of experiencing empathy or guilt, a narcissistic psychopath treats other people as objects of need fulfillment and wish fulfillment. This makes it easy for him to use and abuse them, in his personal relationships and in large-scale actions, without compunction. His lack of conscience renders him blind to higher human values, which allows him to disregard them entirely or treat them instrumentally as means to his ends, the same way he treats people.

This dangerous character defect, however, serves him well in the pursuit of power, money, and adulation. Not having the inhibitions and scruples imposed by empathy and conscience, he can easily lie, cheat, manipulate, destroy, and kill if he wants to—or, when powerful enough, order others to do it for him.

The characteristics indicative of narcissistic psychopathy are observable already in childhood. Biographies of tyrants (Fromm 1973; Miller 1990; Newell 2016) note the early manifestations of vanity, sensation-seeking, and impulsivity often accompanied by poor self-control, aggression and callousness, manipulateness, and a strong competitive drive and desire to dominate coexistent with a lack of empathy and conscience. Plato remarked on the “spirited” character of a future tyrant showing the above-mentioned symptoms already in his youth.

Another common, but not universal, biographical finding is a history of childhood abuse. Here, however, accounts vary; for example, while some, like Miller (1990), stress Hitler’s purported severe abuse at the hands of his stepfather, others (Fromm 1973; Newell 2016) note that his childhood was uneventful in this respect. Biographies can be incomplete or tendentious, intentionally and not, and so it is not always possible to verify the truth. It is impossible to rule out narcissistic upbringing as being involved in raising a future tyrant—creating a narcissistic injury that shapes the child’s life and sets

him on a path of “repairing” it through a ruthless and often sadistic pursuit of power and adulation—even when there is no evidence of overt abuse and/or neglect in his biographical data.

While the exact causes of this character defect are a matter of speculation, their possible origins offer intriguing possibilities explaining their clinical manifestations. For example, a narcissistic injury in the first years of a child’s life could possibly impair development of the object constancy capacity. This results in an inability to grasp and adhere to the solidity of facts and, consequently, in a disregard for the truth and other human values, the understanding of which comprises a large part of our conscience. The narcissistic psychopath’s propensity to lie, whether on purpose to achieve a specific result or, seemingly effortlessly, to invent a universe of “alternative facts” that just happen to affirm his grandiose and guiltless image of himself, could be a result of that impaired object constancy capacity.

His lack of empathy, whether resulting from an inborn cause or narcissistic/authoritarian upbringing, would further (or separately) limit development of his conscience and influence not only the child’s socioemotional development but also his cognitive capacities, resulting in what Burkle (2016) calls being smart but not bright. Dąbrowski (1996) termed this as one-sided development, where intelligence and certain cognitive skills develop more or less normally but one’s emotional growth remains stunted. The capacity for emotional development is crucial, as this is the only kind of growth possible throughout our lifespan: expanding and deepening our conscience, and spurring us to learning and meaningful change.

Whether the developmental arrest typical for this form of pathology is inborn, acquired, or a combination of both nature and nurture, it results in the narrow and inflexible character structure, with intelligence subsumed under primitive drives (for power, sex, and adulation).

As Dąbrowski (1986, trans. E. Mika) writes:

A psychopath is emotionally rigid and narrow. He has strong ambitions and significant talents, but they remain narrow and under the influence of primitive drives. He does not experience inner conflicts, but instead he creates external ones. He is not capable of empathy, and so he strives to gain control over others, or, before he can gain dominance, he submits to the control of others. He is usually deaf and blind to the problems of others, to their development and developmental difficulties. He relentlessly realizes his own goals. A psychopath exists on the level of *primary integration* and is emotionally stunted.

We can distinguish “small” and “big” psychopaths. We find the big ones among the most notorious world criminals, and among aggressive tyrants and dictators (e.g., Nero, Hitler) who do not hesitate to sacrifice others for their own goals. For a big psychopath, a person and a social group do not have any moral value. To him, rules of justice do not exist. Genocide or concentration camps are not a moral problem for him, but a means to an end.

Small psychopaths are miniatures of the big ones. In general, they submit to big psychopaths in the right circumstances. A small psychopath looks for opportunities to realize his own interests and to satisfy his desire to wreak havoc in society. A psychopath thinks that laws are to be broken and that they do not apply to him. He uses any circumstances to secure his position, money, and fortune, regardless of the consequences for others, without any consideration for ethical norms. Psychopaths do not know how to emotionally compare themselves with others, they cannot emotionally understand others, and they lack an empathic attitude.

The individual distinctions between “small” and “big” psychopaths, a.k.a. tyrants, appear to lie predominantly in the level of their narcissism, observed by

Burkle (2015), but also in the presence of some socially approved skills, an ability to modulate and/or mask their aggressive impulses and deeds, as well as life opportunities and luck. A narcissistic psychopath without sufficiently developed self-control or advantageous life opportunities may turn into a mass killer whose crimes will land him in prison before his grandiose dreams of power and domination come to fruition.

Narcissistic psychopaths turned tyrants possess the right combination of manipulateness, self-control, and intelligence to convince others to support them long enough to put their grandiose ideas to work on a large scale. They also appear to possess skills that are seen as charisma, the most frequent of which is the ability to deliver public speeches that inspire others to follow them. More often than not, however, this “charisma” is simply their ability to tell others what they want to hear (i.e., to lie), to make them go along with whatever scheme they’ve concocted for the moment. Their glibness is something that easily fools normal people, who do not understand the kind of pathology that results from a missing conscience.

Once in positions of power, tyrants can fully unleash their sadism under the cloak of perverted ideals, which they peddle as a cover for their primitive drives. Instead of turning into common criminals condemned by society, they become oppressors and/or murderers of thousands or millions, with their atrocities always justified in their own minds and those of their supporters. This is why Pol Pot could say without hesitation: “[Y]ou can look at me. Am I a savage person? My conscience is clear” (Mydans 1997), even though he was directly responsible for the deaths of millions of his compatriots.

Tyrants identify with other tyrants and find inspiration in their successes, while remaining oblivious to their failures. They recognize and respect power as much as they are envious of and despise its wielders. The greater and more ruthless the living or historical tyrant, the bigger an inspiration he is for aspiring ones. His disdain for morality and law and his unbridled aggression in pursuit of

power appeal to the tyrant in the making and form a template for his behavior, showing him what is possible.

On the eve of invading Poland in 1939, Hitler, after issuing orders to “mercilessly and without pity” annihilate “every man, woman, and child of Polish ethnicity and language,” spoke admiringly of one such role model: “Genghis Khan had sent millions of women and children to their deaths, and did so consciously and with a happy heart. History sees in him only the great founder of states.” Then he exhorted his subordinates in Poland to “be hard, spare nothing, act faster, and more brutally than the others”—and they eagerly obliged (Gellately 2007).

The upcoming tyrant dreams of becoming as great as and preferably greater than his favorite tyrannical role models; and if those role models are alive, the tyrant-in-the making can be expected to curry favor with the existing ones while plotting their demise and besting them in the tyrants’ world rankings. To accomplish this, though, he must obtain a position of ultimate power within his own nation first.

This brings us to the second leg of the tyrannical beast ...

The Tyrant’s Supporters

The process through which the tyrant gains popularity and power usually baffles the outside observers and historians looking at it from the perspective of time, as its main ingredient, narcissism, somehow remains invisible to both participants and observers.

The tyrant’s narcissism is the main attractor of his followers, who project their hopes and dreams onto him. The more grandiose his sense of his own self and his promises to his fans, the greater their attraction and the stronger their support. As Plato wrote in *The Republic*, “The people have always some champion whom they set over them and nurse into greatness.”

Through the process of identification, the tyrant’s followers absorb his

omnipotence and glory and imagine themselves as powerful as he is, the winners in the game of life. This identification heals the followers' narcissistic wounds, but also tends to shut down their reason and conscience, allowing them to engage in immoral and criminal behaviors with a sense of impunity engendered by this identification. Without the support of his narcissistic followers, who see in the tyrant a reflection and vindication of their long-nursed dreams of glory, the tyrant would remain a middling nobody.

The interplay of grandiose hopes and expectations between the tyrant-in-the-making and his supporters that suffuses him with power and helps propel him to a position of political authority is an example of narcissistic collusion: a meshing of mutually compatible narcissistic needs. The people see in him their long-awaited savior and a father substitute, hinting at the narcissistic abuse implicated in the authoritarian upbringing that demands obedience and worship of the all-powerful parental figure. In their faith and unquestioning admiration, he in turn receives a ready line of narcissistic supply, thousands of mirrors reflecting his greatness.

Describing the narcissistic collusion between the tyrant and his supporters, Erich Fromm (1980) stressed the elements of submission to and identification with the strongman:

The highly narcissistic group is eager to have a leader with whom it can identify itself. The leader is then admired by the group which projects its narcissism onto him. In the very act of submission to the powerful leader, which is in depth an act of symbiosis and identification, the narcissism of the individual is transferred onto the leader. The greater the leader, the greater the follower. Personalities who as individuals are particularly narcissistic are the most qualified to fulfill this function. The narcissism of the leader who is convinced of his greatness, and who has no doubts, is precisely what attracts the narcissism of those who submit

to him. The half-insane leader is often the most successful one until his lack of objective judgment, his rage reaction in consequence to any setback, his need to keep up the image of omnipotence may provoke him to make mistakes which lead to his destruction. But there are always gifted half-psychotics at hand to satisfy the demands of a narcissistic mass.

Jerrold Post (2015) underscored the authoritarian parenting aspect of that identification when discussing Hitler Youth:

Especially for the Hitler Youth Movement, which was at the forefront of Hitler's support, Hitler's externalizing hate-mongering rhetoric was a comforting and inspiring message, and Hitler provided the strong inspiring father figure that these children could not find within their own families. But, in rebelling against their own families, they submitted uncritically to Hitler's authoritarian leadership. Importantly, Adolf Hitler's unleashing of the demons of war was turning the passive humiliation of defeat [in World War I] into the active experience of redemptive action.

The narcissistic mixture of elevated expectations, resentments, and desire for revenge on specific targets and/or society in general for not meeting those expectations is what sociologist Michael Kimmel (2013) called aggrieved entitlement. Although Kimmel talked specifically about white American men in the twenty-first century, some form of aggrieved entitlement has been driving tyrants and their supporters, as well as organized and "lone wolf" terrorists, the world over since time immemorial.

The tyrant makes many good-sounding—but also openly unrealistic, bordering on delusional—promises to his supporters, and usually has no intention or ability to fulfill most of them (if any). He holds his supporters in

contempt, as he does “weaker” human beings in general, and uses them only as props in his domination- and adulation-oriented schemes.

The narcissistic collusion between the tyrant and his supporters is also driven by the latter’s need for revenge, for the tyrant is always chosen to perform this psychically restorative function: to avenge the humiliations (narcissistic wounds) of his followers and punish those who inflicted them.

However, as the wounds often date to the supporters’ personal ancient past and more often than not are perceived rather than real, the choice of the object of this vengeful punishment is not based on reality. Rather, it is based on the displacement and projection characteristic of the scapegoating process that becomes an inextricable part of the narcissistic collusion between the tyrant and his followers.

The scapegoating designates the Others as an object upon which the narcissistic revenge will be inflicted. The Others always represent the split-off, devalued, and repressed parts of the narcissistic individual’s own psyche, which are projected onto them. These projections are shared and augmented through a narcissism of small differences (Freud 1991), which allows us to focus on and enlarge insignificant differences between ourselves and the Others in order to solidify our negative projections and justify our contempt and aggression toward them.

The tyrant and his followers typically choose as vessels for their negative projections and aggression the members of society who are not just different but weaker. The tyrant fuels that aggression in order to solidify his power but also to deflect it from himself, shield his own narcissism, and repair his own narcissistic injuries dating to his childhood. The figure of the narcissistic parental abuser/tyrant is protected through the scapegoating and the return to the authoritarian, order- and obedience-based mode of social functioning promised by the tyrant, as he himself assumes the mantle of father-protector and directs his own and his supporters’ aggression onto the Others, who have nothing to do with

those supporters' real and perceived wounds.

The tyrant's own narcissism hints at the level of woundedness in his supporters. The greater their narcissistic injury, the more grandiose the leader required to repair it. While his grandiosity appears grotesque to non-narcissistic people who do not share his agenda, to his followers he represents all their denied and thwarted greatness, which now, under his rule, will finally flourish. Hitler's bizarre dream of a Thousand-Year Reich spread upon the world did not seem at all preposterous or dangerous to so many Germans suffering from the pain, humiliation, and privations inflicted upon them by the fiasco of World War I, just as Stalin's vision of communism as dictatorship of the working class taking over the world did not appear strange or dangerous to his beleaguered followers. Narcissism is blind to itself.

The natural consequence of scapegoating that stems from the projections of the narcissist's devalued parts of himself is dehumanization of the Others, which then justifies all kinds of atrocities perpetrated on them. The ease with which this attitude spreads in narcissistic groups is frightening, and indicative of a narcissistic rage that fuels it, a rage focused on purging, psychically and physically, all that is weak and undesirable from the narcissists' inner and external worlds.

That rage, along with dreams of glory, is what makes the bond between the tyrant and his followers so strong that it remains impervious to reality. It also makes the tyrant's rule easier, as he does not have to exert himself much to infect his followers with contempt for the dehumanized Others and incite aggression against them. In fact, the tyrant's permission for such aggression appears to be a large part of his appeal to his blood- and revenge-thirsty followers.

The tyrant's and his followers' projections always reveal much about their own pathology. In his private notes about Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland, Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, wrote that they were "not people

anymore” but “beasts of prey equipped with a cold intellect” (Gellately 2007), the latter description obviously more applicable to Goebbels and the Nazis themselves than their victims (who, it must be stressed, were observed by Goebbels in captivity, under dehumanizing conditions of ghetto life).

Once we dehumanize the Others and imbue them with a murderous motivation directed at us, we can easily rationalize any act of violence we perpetrate upon them as self-defense. And so, removing en masse and without mercy those “beasts of prey” became one of the main goals of the Nazis, who believed that Jews, Poles, Gypsies, and other non-Aryans threatened their existence. The fear, whether genuine or faked, stemming from this false belief was used as a sufficient justification for mass murder on a scale unseen previously in the modern world.

It must be noted that the tyrant’s supporters and especially sycophants within his closest circle tend to share his character defect. The sycophantic echo chamber around the tyrant magnifies but also hides his pathology. His surrogates usually serve as ego substitutes to his rampaging id, and are responsible for introducing and implementing his destructive plans in ways that would seem rational and acceptable to the public.

Their role becomes more important with time, as he psychologically decompensates, which inevitably happens to narcissistic psychopaths in positions of ultimate power. As his paranoia, grandiosity, and impulsivity grow, his aides, family members, and surrogates, fearful for their positions and often their lives, scramble to preserve an image of his “normalcy” and greatness for public consumption to the very end. Their loyalty can be fierce and undying, unlike that of the tyrant himself.

The Society

Tyrants do not arise in a vacuum, just as tyranny does not spring on the world unannounced. It takes years of cultivation of special conditions in a society for a

tyranny to take over. Those conditions invariably include a growing and unbearably oppressive economic and social inequality ignored by the elites who benefit from it, at least for a time; fear, moral confusion, and chaos that come from that deepening inequality; a breakdown of social norms; and growing disregard for the humanity of a large portion of the population and for higher values. In effect, we could see that the pre-tyrannical societies, whether nominally democratic or based on other forms of political organization, exhibit signs of a narcissistic pathology writ large. Those involve the inevitable split into their grandiose and devalued parts, including those of the society's self-image, and a denial of their shadow, which is projected outward onto Others.

Oppressive, dehumanizing (narcissistic) systems, like narcissists themselves, cultivate their delusions of superiority on the basis of that internal, unseen, and unspoken split between the grandiose blameless I/Us and the devalued, inferior Others. The Others become repositories of the narcissists' repressed vices, just as the tyrant is the vessel for their grandiose beliefs about themselves.

Another narcissistic aspect of such societies is the growing and ruthless competition, jealousy, and aggression within its borders, but also directed externally toward other nations in a scapegoating mechanism that is meant to prevent an internal breakdown of a society by redirecting its narcissistic rage onto external objects. Oftentimes, these vulnerable societies reel from some form of a narcissistic injury, such as the humiliation of a lost war, international sanctions, or treaties perceived as unfair, as Germany did after the Treaty of Versailles after World War I.

None of these processes is openly acknowledged or even noticed by the members of the society, save by a few typically ignored Cassandras. Just as individual narcissists are incapable of experiencing guilt, taking responsibility for their vices, or making genuine efforts to set things right in their lives, narcissistic societies also persist in their self-destructive blindness. While the chaos and discord brew in the underclasses, the elites, ensconced in their

narcissistic bubbles, remain oblivious to the suffering of their fellow citizens and the fate it portends for the nation.

Fritz Stern (2005) has said that “German moderates and German elites underestimated Hitler, assuming that most people would not succumb to his Manichean unreason; they did not think that his hatred and mendacity could be taken seriously.” Hitler was seen by many as a bombastic but harmless buffoon, while many others, including members of clergy, intellectual elites, and the wealthy were nevertheless mesmerized by his grand visions of Germany’s future glory, and eagerly supported his agenda.

Narcissism of the elites makes them as well blind to the encroaching tyranny. It is a convenient—and yes, narcissistic—myth that only the dispossessed and uninformed would support the tyrant. It is not the economic or educational status that determines such susceptibility, but one’s narcissism, and that cuts across socioeconomic strata. Dorothy Thompson describes it brilliantly in her 1941 essay, “Who Goes Nazi?,” in which she identifies those threads of frustrated grandiosity, resentments, and hatreds in the well-heeled individuals’ characters that make them fall for tyrannical ideologies and movements. She also observes those who would naturally resist the toxic pull of Nazism, noting their humility and depth.

Stern (2005) quotes a letter from philosopher and Nobel Prize–winning physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, who confessed to him “that he had never believed in Nazi ideology but that he had been tempted by the movement, which seemed to him then like ‘the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.’ On reflection, he thought that National Socialism had been part of a process that the National Socialists themselves had not understood. He may well have been right. The Nazis did not realize that they were part of a historic process in which resentment against a disenchanting secular world found deliverance in the ecstatic escape of unreason.”

Note that the process that the Nazis themselves had not understood is the very

narcissistic collusion, a near-psychotic infection with this virus of grandiosity and rage on a mass scale. It is rarely grasped, not even from the perspective of time, as our blindness makes it impossible to acknowledge it, which renders our narcissism the last taboo in a world that has dispensed with taboos. Our denial and social amnesia further entrench our incomprehension and ensure that history repeats itself.

Part of our forgetting involves distortions of historical and psychological facts. Safely removed, time- and distance-wise, from the latest tyranny-caused mayhem, we tend to imagine tyrants as instantly recognizable evil beings and tyrannies as something exotic enough never to happen to us. But as history and experience demonstrate, power-hungry narcissistic psychopaths do not look different from normal people; and if they stand out, it is often for socially approved reasons: their resolve, charisma, decisiveness, and ability to inspire others.

No tyrant comes to power on the platform of genocidal tyranny, even though such ideas may be brewing already in the recesses of his mind. Each and every one of them promises to bring back law and order, create better economic conditions for the people, and restore the nation's glory.

These empty promises—for the tyrant has little desire and even less ability to fulfill them—are always tied together with the thread of scapegoating Others, a necessary component that channels the narcissistic rage outward and increases the society's cohesion. But the tyrant sows discord and division among his own peoples as well. He cannot help it: pitting people against one another satisfies his irrepressible sadistic urge and makes it easier for him to dominate and control them.

The tyrant shows up in a society that is already weakened by disorder, blind to it, and unable and/or unwilling to take corrective measures that would prevent a tyrannical takeover. Once he and his sycophantic cabal assume power, they deepen and widen the disorder, dismantling and changing the society's norms,

institutions, and laws to fully reflect their own pathology.

Andrew Łobaczewski (2007) discusses at length the formation and progression of *pathocracies*, political and other systems run by characterologically impaired individuals, predominantly psychopaths and narcissists. He describes how pathocracies change the society by the introduction of *paralogisms*, ways of distorting reality and truth; and *paramoralisms*, methods of perverting moral values. Under tyranny, paralogisms and paramoralisms are unleashed on a large scale through various propagandist means that include repetition of flat-out lies, accompanied by denials and obfuscations served through the increasingly centralized and controlled media. Fortified by magical thinking and contempt for reason, these distortions lead to the creation of the kind of absurdist unreality well known to people raised in authoritarian regimes, where up is down and black is white, and where what one knows to be true may have nothing to do with the officially sanctioned version of the truth.

We can see the tyrant's own pathology influencing every area of a society's functioning, from politics through culture and social mores to science and technology. What is being seen, said, and studied, and what's ignored and silenced, depends on the tyrant's whims, and soon enough the society itself and its ideology are structured in ways that meet his pathological needs for power and adulation. The implementation of this ideology is usually a gradual process, one that is eventually reinforced by the use of violence against persistent objectors.

As freedom of speech, the press, and assembly disappears and the tyrant's destructive "reforms" take hold, an ethos of the New Man, an ideal of a human being compatible with the disordered ideology, is forced upon the populace.

This New Man is a dehumanized caricature of a human person, usually exemplifying the tyrant's distorted views and thus meeting his pathological needs, mainly for dominance and adulation. He—we will use the male pronoun,

but there is of course a compatible version of the New Woman to go with the New Man—is wholly devoted to the Cause and the Leader (which, in tyrannies, are often one and the same, an ultimate expression of the tyrant’s narcissism) and acts in prescribed ways meant to demonstrate this devotion in his life. Hero worship and utmost loyalty become parts of the New Man’s prescribed behavior, reinforced by new laws and norms, but also by individuals who eagerly cooperate with the authoritarian rules by spying on and denouncing their fellow citizens’ ideologically improper behavior.

Our human propensity to submit to inhumane rules established by pathological authority cannot be overestimated. We have plenty of historical and contemporary evidence for it, as well as experimental data (Milgram 1974). An approving nod from an authority figure, no matter how insignificant or even real, can easily absolve us of responsibility in our minds and override any scruples imposed by our conscience, proving its perplexing malleability.

The ease with which many so-called normal people shut down their conscience makes them not very different from functional psychopaths. This disturbing fact of human life is something the tyrant counts on when he establishes his reign. He knows that he can expect loyalty from his followers and successfully demand it from the majority of society. And those unwilling to follow his dictates and/or actively opposing them will be eliminated.

The New Man’s thoughts must of course change, too, to better aid his transformation. Thus, the criteria of mental normalcy and pathology also are redefined, and psychology and psychiatry, like other branches of social science, are coopted to serve the regime. What’s considered normal, both in the sense of statistical norm and mental health, is in fact pathological, and mental health, defined as the capacity for multilevel and multidimensional development, is pathologized.

The ease with which the tyrannical ideology spreads is always greater than we want to imagine. Our narcissistic blindness makes it impossible for us to

believe that it could happen here and that we, too, could be as susceptible to it as any other human beings in history.

Tyranny feeds on the irrationality of narcissistic myths and magical thinking, even though its ideology may be disguised as hyperrationalism, as was the case with communism. In this, it very much resembles the narcissistically psychopathic character of the tyrant himself: solipsistic, withdrawn from reality, and full of grandiose and paranoid beliefs impervious to the corrective influences of objective facts.

These pathological factors ensure that eventually the tyrant's reign collapses. The inherent and violent irrationality, bereft of internal brakes that stem from a conscience, and unchecked by external forces, is the main reason tyrants and their regimes are doomed to fail (Glad 2002). Their growing malignancy (corruption, aggression, and oppression) provokes opposition, which eventually brings the tyranny down, but not until its pillaging and violent reign create much human suffering. The reset of a society's mores that follows the tragic aftermath of a tyrannical rule usually leads to a greater appreciation for the importance of universal human values (equality, justice, truth, and compassion), but if care is not taken to implement these values in consistent practice, our narcissistic tendencies creep in and lead to social disorder, making us susceptible to tyranny again. Given our growing potential for self-destruction, the stakes go up with every tyrannical turn.

Conclusion

Narcissism is as much a character problem as it is an error in our thinking. Seeing oneself as "above" is the general attitude of a narcissist toward the world, and the error of the tyrant and his followers. This error appears to grip many so-called civilized human societies, and is especially pronounced in those where inequality grows despite any official sloganeering to the contrary. Our narcissism is what gives rise to inequality, and inequality fuels our narcissism.

The resultant suffering and despair, along with a desire for revenge, are among the necessary conditions for the emergence of tyranny.

As Burkle (2015) observes, we are seeing a resurgence of tyrannical leaders around the globe, even in nations that supposedly have learned the lessons of tyrannies past in the most painful ways. It is a sign of our pressing need to reckon with our collective shadow.

If we as a species are to flourish and prosper, we need to understand that our urgent and necessary task is to transcend and dismantle our narcissism, both individual and collective.

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