

see origins for this in his childhood experiences with his mother?

PHE: Obama is certainly less conciliatory in foreign than domestic policy. He has a far more internationalist focus than most of his fellow Americans, partly because of his mother's influence in marrying an African and Indonesian and leading an expatriate life. His foreign focus is also centered in Africa and Asia, rather than on Europe, as has been the case with internationalist presidents prior to the second George Bush. His college friends included Pakistanis. Ann did so much to direct her son to the world, especially that of black and brown people, but he reports, that the word "Power... fixed in my mother's mind like a curse" (*Dreams*, 45). But power had taken her son, and in foreign policy Barack can exercise power with fewer obstructions than in domestic policy. As an aside, although his mother died so long before his presidency, it was two women, the Secretary of State and ambassador to the UN, who were credited with persuading Obama to become involved in the Libyan Civil War—in my view a serious mistake.

KAF: Obama has carried on the interventionist tradition of American presidents since the beginning of the Cold War. Oddly enough, Obama has embraced regime change in Egypt and Libya, though without the use of ground troops used by the second President Bush. I can see where Obama might derive internationalism from his parents' background and experiences, but I still do not know if his active interventionism can be traced back to the influence of his mother.

PHE: The President was shaped by his mother while very deliberately wanting to lead a very different type of life than she. Your question brings up so many issues, since our mothers create the world in which we live. I will limit my response to several issues. Just as his mother did, Obama listens carefully to others and is inclined to be a conciliator. This both helped him win the presidency, has provided more space for his opponents to fill, and has resulted in many seeing him as weak, which is not the case. Ann was determined and tough and taught her only son to be the same, behind his ready smile. While loving, she also spanked him; indeed she is reported to have used a belt when he did not do his homework. Although a White House spokesman said he never was raised with corporal punishment, my inclination is to believe the story of the

houseboy who lived in their tight living space in Jakarta and dismiss the presidential public relations statement (Scott, 130). He has struggled against being a dreamer like her and her father (called "Gramps"). As you have noted, she declared she was "from Mars," but Ann raised her son to be much more grounded than she was. His mother was very methodological in much of her work, but took a very long time to complete her doctoral degree, unlike Barack, who is quicker to get things done.

KAF: Obama's responses to his mother are an inextricable mixture of identification and counter-identification. She was his model and lifeblood, then again part of why he developed his sense of himself as black rather than biracial is in reaction to what she failed to give him. How would you connect the positives and negatives of Obama's relationship with his mother to his strengths and weaknesses as President?

PHE: The President writes that he gets his values of concern for the poor, "fairness," "honesty," "independent judgment," and "straight talk" from his mother (*Dreams*, 49), but there is not space available to us here to determine to what extent he really lives by these values as a political leader or how he attempts to implement them. Whether they strengthen or weaken his presidency is an even more complex issue. I will conclude by noting that we have highlighted the personality and impact of his mother and somewhat narrowed the differences between our two approaches to Obama.

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On the Psychoanalytic Sociology of Eli Sagan

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In his specific contribution to psychoanalytic theory, *Friend, Women and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil*, Eli Sagan (1988) addresses and corrects a serious deficiency in Freudian the

ory. Freud considered conscience one of the functions of the superego (the others being self-observation and maintenance of the ego ideal) and viewed the superego as coming into being around five years of age with the shattering of the Oedipus complex due to the fear of castration by the rival. But according to Paul Bloom, "The Moral Life of Babies," *New York Times Magazine* (May 5, 2010), we know, now even in light of empirical infant research that conscience has its roots much earlier than this.

Although the work of Melanie Klein is not central to Sagan's theorizing, her work, and that of her colleagues, supports his general argument. Kleimans have long distinguished persecutory guilt, which amounts to self-torment, from depressive guilt which instead of being all about the self (as in shame and self-persecution) is about caring for and making reparation to the other. The dating of the move from the paranoid-schizoid and narcissistic position into the depressive position and the capacity for concern is controversial, but there is no doubt that conscience, as depressive position concern for the other, arises far earlier than the Freudian superego. As Sagan points out, it is difficult to comprehend how a mental function such as the superego—which is about aggression—turned back against the self under the threat of castration and that operates, in Freud's words, "like a garrison in a conquered city" can be the seat of conscientious concern for others. Whereas the superego is fueled by hate, the conscience is grounded in attachment and love.

Sagan beautifully illustrates the distinction between conscience and superego by pointing to "Huck's dilemma," referring to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. His superego demands that he turn his runaway slave companion Jim in to the authorities, while his conscience demands that he protect him. As Sagan explains, the superego, in addition to being about aggression turned against the self, is formed through internalization of the culture and the culture that is internalized is often racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. Drawing on Robert Lifton's work on the Nazi doctors, Sagan points out that they were, for the most part, not psychopaths but severely misguided idealists: they did their work "under the banner of the superego." In my 2010 article "Superego, Conscience and the Nature and Types of Guilt," found in *Modern Psy-*

choanalysis, 35, 1, I have elaborated on these issues.

In addition to the important distinction between superego and conscience, *Freud, Women and Morality* contains many other important corrections to standard Freudian theory, such as the point that only a few Freudian analysts (such as Hans Loewald) have grasped that the healthy resolution of the Oedipus complex is not renunciation out of fear of castration but rather finding a sublimated way to "kill" the rival and possess the desired loved one ("object" in psychoanalytic terminology). Sagan points out that even Freud's own case history of "Little Hans" makes this clear: Hans is freed from his phobia when he gets a symbolically bigger and better penis than his father's and has babies with his mother. Sagan's (1974) first book, *Cannibalism: Human Aggression and Cultural Form*, one of the very few psychohistorical studies of the currently neglected concept of sublimation, describes the progressive cultural development from cannibalism (oral devouring), to head-hunting (anal collecting), and on to slavery and other forms of (phallic) domination.

Cannibalism is followed by *The Last to Annihilate: A Psychoanalytic Study of Violence in Ancient Greek Culture* (1979), *At the Dawn of Tyranny: The Origins of Individualism, Political Oppression and the State* (1985), *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America* (1991) and *Citizens and Cannibals: The French Revolution, the Struggle for Modernity, and the Origins of Ideological Terror* (2001). Following the lead of Talcott Parsons and his student Robert Bellah and elaborating on their work, Sagan has developed a psychoanalytically informed theory of the stages of social evolution: from primitive (hunter-gatherer and tribal society organized through kinship), to what he calls complex society (kingdoms such as those that existed in Buganda, Hawaii, and Tahiti), to the archaic civilizations of Sumera, Babylonia, Egypt, to the classical civilizations of Athens and ancient Israel (Parsons' "seed-bed" societies), to the early Modern monarchies and finally the emergence of Modern democratic societies.

In all this Sagan, like Hegel, sees in history the gradual evolution of the spirit of liberty and extension of human rights, not just to the narrowly defined citizens (as in Athens, where the slaves and

women were excluded) but to an ever-widening group of people; he views this as an attempt to transcend the paranoid position and to sustain and develop the miracle of democracy which is based on the remarkable capacity of some people to regard the opposition as loyal, not as evil aggressors to be eliminated. This is progress, but it induces such anxiety that periodic severe regressions (Stalinism, Nazism) occur. Sagan sees the modern world as intensely ambivalent: on one hand, we appear to want to carry the democratic project to its natural conclusion, but we are stalled by the anxiety such liberation evokes and by the forces of reaction. The incapacity of Democrats and Republicans in America today to even speak to each other, and such phenomena as the Tea Party, are evidence of such ambivalence. The 1960s youth counterculture displayed both of these characteristics: an impulse toward generosity, peace, love, play, pleasure and democracy, on one hand, but also severely regressive tendencies toward paranoia, narcissism, sexism and authoritarianism on the other.

Returning to the themes of *Freud, Women and Morality*, we might think of this contradiction precisely as conflict between a progressive, humanistic conscience and a regressive and reactionary superego. In 1925, Franz Alexander defined the goal of psychoanalysis as elimination of the superego; two years later, in 1927, Sandor Ferenczi agreed. But confusing the superego with conscience, most psychoanalysis feared elimination of the former would entail destruction of the latter and amount to the promotion of psychopathy. While Alexander and Ferenczi posited mature morality as a rational ego function involving thinking through the consequences of one's actions for others and oneself, Sagan recognizes with Jean-Jacques Rousseau that conscience arises not from reason but from feeling; from what Rousseau called "pity," by which he meant empathy or fellow-feeling. Since learning in Philosophy 101 that "one cannot deduce an *ought* from an *is*," that science is *descriptive* not *prescriptive* and, therefore, limited to the field of fact not value (the fact/value disjunction), I have recognized with Pascal that "the heart has reasons, reason cannot know." If Sagan understands that whereas the superego arises through *identification with the aggressor* and operates essentially in accordance with the *talion* law of revenge ("an eye for an eye"), conscience arises through

identification with the nurturer and operates through an analogous reciprocity, only one in which one feels called upon to return love for love received.

Donald Carverth's biography may be found on page 262.

[Editor's Note: In this journal Sagan was interviewed by the editor in June 2001, and in December 2008 there was a small symposium on his evolutionary theory. Presently, a Psychohistory Forum co-sponsored conference on Sagan's work is being planned by Professor Carverth, tentatively scheduled for mid-September 2012.] □

A Culture of Bullies: An English Boys' Boarding School Experience in the 1930s

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When my elder brother introduced me to sex when I was ten, we shared a guilty secret that bonded us together, but caused me also to feel ashamed. He had been introduced to sexual exploration at English boarding school. I must admit I made little objection to his actions at the time, which seemed like fun. I had no notion it had lasting consequences, or that some years later, when I followed him to the same school, I was to some extent already marked for discovery by masters who liked little boys.

The institution I attended was a modest but traditional private school founded on non-conformist Christian principles to teach middle class values to young people who were expected to achieve great things in later life. Theoretically free from the dogma and high church customs of Catholics and the Church of England, it still focused much effort on upholding religious belief. Like many other aspects of the school, the services conducted on Sunday were not exempt from double standards; they often seemed particularly hypocritical since the professed love, truth, and charity they preached were seldom to be found the moment Chapel was over.

By the time I arrived, there seemed to be a single educational belief that all authorities agreed upon: children are born with an evil nature for which the only correctives are discipline and punishment. Since our school prided itself on turning boys into men, it