

16.1

ARE INTERPERSONAL DYSERGIES INEVITABLE?

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In Chapter 8 (this volume), we explored the question of whether intrapersonal conflicts were inevitable. Similarly, it has been argued that they may be inevitable at the interpersonal level. Schopenhauer (1969), for instance, writes, 'We see not only how everyone tries to snatch from another what he himself wants, but how one often destroys another's whole happiness of life, in order to increase by an insignificant amount his own well-being' (p. 333). Similarly, for Sartre (1958), the 'look' of the other constantly threatens to turn the 'I' into an object: a fixed thing that is devoid of freedom and possibilities. In attempting to defend ourselves against such objectification, Sartre suggests that human beings may try to objectify the other instead, and get locked in a battle of objectify-or-be-objectified. For Sartre, then, relationships are essentially a zero-sum game: almost inevitably frustrating, unfulfilling and conflict-ridden. 'Hell', his character Garcin famously suggests, 'is other people' (Sartre, 1989). For Sartre, racism is one manifestation of this human tendency: where the other becomes an instrument by which I can progress towards my own goals of self-worth and security (Sartre, 1948). As a black man, Fanon (1991) writes, 'I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects' (p. 82). Research into social identity theory, discussed above, would also suggest that, as soon as dyads or groups are formed at an interpersonal level, then conflict is likely to come about (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

As we have seen, however, at the individual level, there are no highest-order directions towards interpersonal dysergies or conflicts (Chapter 6, this volume). The desire for autonomy, perhaps, is the closest; and given our fundamental interdependence, the freedom of one human being may frequently rub against the freedom of another. Yet, from a pluralistic standpoint, 'A healthy social order can perfectly well be based not on agreement but on the sort of mutual restraint in which subgroups simply go their own way in the face of dissensus' (Rescher, 1993, p. 167). Moreover, as de Beauvoir (1948) argues, each of us desires and needs the freedom of the other to realise our own freedom. That is, if the other becomes a depersonalised mechanism or object to me, my own freedom to do things becomes meaningless. Most importantly perhaps, as we have seen throughout this book, the desire for relatedness seems to be one of the most compelling of human directions; and this is an inherently synergetic force. While 'centrifugal' forces such as autonomy, then, may have the potential to drive us away from others; it may be more than compensated for by the 'centripetal' power of love.

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