

Destructiveness As a Part of Aliveness

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Understanding the reinforcing function of the hostile imagining or wish.

- *Aliveness in the negating of life, of connection, of relatedness.*
- *What cannot find its way into expression, in an embodied related way, positively, remains embedded in a hostile, life-rejecting way in the mind.*
- *When we struggle with relatedness, we struggle to make room for first ourselves to exist – through a yes or a no – then to make room for the otherness of the other.*

We need to evolve to the point where we can outlast, if not embrace, each other's destructive element. Destructiveness is a part of aliveness. Winnicott feels it is crucial for a baby to have a sense that another can take his or her aliveness. When the destructiveness built into aliveness and a vital part of self comes flying at the mother, can the mother not retaliate?

Not just a matter of turning the other cheek.

Not only a matter of delighting in baby's energy, although that can be a part of it.

There is a moment when embracing baby's energy is not the point, but not retaliating is. At such a moment, the caregiver or caretaker (give-and-take) is not long-suffering or striking back or resentful.

Everything hinges on recognizing the destructive "attack" for what it is, a spontaneous part of aliveness. The destructive momentum of aliveness is joined by a spontaneous act of recognition.

This does not mean the mother subjects herself to chronic injury. It does mean that she does not blow up an imaginary injury and respond in moralistic, annihilating ways.

This involves human beings evolving to the point where they make room for the destructive element that is part of the backcloth of relationships. It means making room for disturbing feelings.

If we make room for each other we won't have to murder each other – at least, murder won't be lethal. We mitigate effects of murderous feelings by making room for them.

We make room for ourselves and each other in such a way that murder will not be fatal.

If we get it right, just the opposite. Murder feeds living. It is part of the rich stream of feeling that adds complexity and shading. Murder is part of the way we grow.

An ideal or optimal scenario might be the baby lashing out, all-out striving, perhaps in fury, a full blast explosion, and the mother absolutely delighting in the baby's energy.

This can happen if the baby's distress doesn't dominate pleasure, if the mother isn't getting hurt, if the mother's joy outweighs fear or anger. A crucial element is baby's bursting out with all his might and the mother not collapsing (withdrawing, lashing out, turning off, etc.). The baby feels there is room for himself and his energy in existence. And there is room for the other. Neither self nor other gets destroyed. The mother survives, perhaps delights in, the onslaught.

"Energy is Eternal delight."

Affirmation of self and energy would be enough, but Winnicott goes further. *The result of the mother's survival is the birth or renewal of a sense of otherness.*

The other's essential self does not undergo alteration for the worse as a result of my attacks.

The result may be expressed something like the following: "I do not damage or do in the other by my energetic display. My energy does not warp or stain or poison or mar or spoil the other. The other can manage or take or survive me without collapse or loss of integrity. My life and might and all-out destructiveness does not destroy. The other is more than the sum of my destructiveness. The other can take my joy."

This allows for the advent of the sort of other that can take me makes it possible to use the other for growth purposes.

If I do not have to spend much time worrying about how I'm affecting the other, I can use the other's 'not-me' material for psychic growth. An important aspect of existence is launched and validated:

1. We use each other for mutual growth.
2. We survive each other's mutual use.
3. We ruthlessly take what we need from each other's insides.
4. We all gain from the taking.

- Excerpted from his book *Ecstasy*