

BIGOTRY: SELF-ESTEEM FOR THE FEARFUL AND INSECURE

by Rutherford

We all need to feel important and worthy and to believe that we are ‘good enough’.

For some, a sense of self-worth is the result of having accomplished a goal requiring determination, effort and sacrifice and one which, at first, we may have been unsure of our ability to achieve.

For those who have no such hard-won accomplishments however, a sense of self-worth can only be achieved by elevating happenstance to the status of a virtue by convincing themselves that their worth is established by things for which they can claim no credit, such as the nation in which they were born, the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, or the faith or socio-economic class of their families.

(It’s a remarkable co-incidence isn’t it that, whatever the characteristic that is held tenaciously to be the source of pride and worth is always what he – and it is often a he – just happened to be born. It must be terrifying to realise that one’s source of worthiness is the result of an accident of birth.)

When someone’s sense of worth is based on such arbitrary foundations, it is vital that **nothing** can be allowed to contradict the claim to worthiness they insist that being white, British, straight, upper class, Christian, able-bodied, right-handed, or whatever bestows and which allows them to feel superior to those unlucky enough not to have been born ‘like me’. (We might call this is the difference between self-worth based on ‘I am better than I was’ – and self-worth based on ‘I am better than he or she is’.)

When those whose self-esteem is based on such accidents of birth encounter others who seem to get along just fine (or worse, actually prosper and succeed) without the benefit of being born white, British, straight, upper class, Christian, able-bodied or... they are confronted by evidence that the ‘special quality’ upon which their worth depends, is not, in fact, all that valuable. To re-establish the importance of whatever accident of fate is the basis of their self-esteem, the ‘Other’ must be demeaned – not so that they will know their place, but so that we can be reassured of ours among ‘the Winners’.

It is worth noting that, as Jung observed, our most potent negative stereotypes are actually reflections of things we detest within *ourselves* because they threaten the self-image we need to maintain to believe that we are ‘okay’. Jung wrote that what we fear most about ourselves is often pushed into the unconscious – from which it is then projected onto The Other and that, by punishing *them*, we try to delude ourselves into believing that we have successfully excised it from ourselves.

We all want to make a difference (have an impact). The emotionally secure do so by creating and contributing; the ignorant, selfish and alienated do so by destroying or defacing.

If you need to be wealthy to feel ‘good enough’, you will oppose social programmes; if your self-esteem depends on being ‘A Man’s Man’, you will despise members of the LGBT+ community. By battering women, belittling our children, bashing gays, blaming Jews or immigrants, supporting policies that punish the poor, or waging war on the Enemy-of-the-Day, we are trying to convince ourselves that We are not like Them and that We are therefore among Life’s winners – and let the Devil take the hindmost. This isn’t politics, it is exorcism – and it has been known to kill.

If anyone had ever wondered how Herr Hitler could have achieved power through the ballot box, they need wonder no longer.

Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one’s self-esteem. That is why young children, before they are aware of their own self-importance, learn so easily; and why older persons, especially if vain or self-important, cannot learn at all. (Thomas Szasz, U.S. psychiatrist)