

WEEKEND

Death's dominion



Megeid Gozny

Noga Klein and Hilo Glazer

'I clung to life in the Holocaust, but not now'

At 82, Israel Neimark is ill with cancer, but has chosen not to undergo treatment. He has no interest, he says, in squeezing out another minute in order to see one more sunbeam or to hang on until his grandson completes his army service

I was born in Warsaw in 1936. The Holocaust for me is not something abstract; I experienced it in the most concrete and traumatic way. A tormented childhood of an unimaginable kind. We were a well-off family. In 1939, we went on vacation to a nearby town and it was there that we got stuck. My father went home to try to save our belongings and never returned. I, my mother, my brother and my older sister were sent to the ghetto. We escaped to the edge of a forest and a convoy of Germans caught us.

We had just split up. I had gone to get water and my sister was looking for scraps of food in garbage cans. From a distance of 40 meters I saw my mother begging, "I have two other children" – and how they shot her and my brother. My sister and I latched on to a group of children and every day we found a different hiding place. I was the youngest of the group. Because we didn't have normal shoes, I went barefoot a lot in the snow and developed gangrene. For a year and a half I couldn't walk and had to crawl. Think what it means for a boy of 6 to have to go back to crawling.

I would find temporary hiding places in doghouses, stairwells, latrines. Even crawling became difficult, and at some point the others ended up putting me alone in an abandoned house. I have a flashback of a Polish doctor passing by and saying that if my legs weren't amputated there was no chance I'd survive, because the gangrene would spread. And I said, "No, without my legs, there is no point to life." And the truth is that I healed miraculously, without treatment. Only a few toes had to be amputated later, which didn't limit me in anything.

One day, toward the end of the war, a German soldier of Polish origin came to the house. The Poles should stop making up stories – most of the killings were due to their informing. In any event, the soldier looked at me and said, "This is a Jew." I said that was a libel, but he asked for irrefutable proof. He stripped me and saw I was circumcised. He declared that I had to be killed, but not here in the yard, so as not to contaminate it. He took me to the forest, holding the gun barrel up against my back. And along the whole way I'm conducting a dialogue with God: "Until now you took pity on me, you saved me when I was in danger of death, you healed me. Why now?"

Suddenly I heard shots. I thought he was shooting me and instinctively I started to run. How did I manage to get away when the pistol was up against my back? I later learned that the soldier hadn't intended to kill me. He too understood that this was the end and was looking for a reason to escape, to defect from his unit. I was his excuse. That's how I was saved. I reached the house of some village woman, who told me I had to run for it, because they were looking for a Jewish boy there. She gave me a loaf of bread and I went on my way.

The war ended. I got to a house where many people were gathered. I must have fallen asleep. When I woke up a priest came over to me, patted me and said, "You know there are no more Jews." He suggested that I convert to Christianity. I said, wow, that sounds like a good solution. He baptized me, I started to prepare for the priesthood and I became his assistant. I thought that was my mission in life.

Just then [weeks later], convoys of deportees started to return. I thought that maybe there was a chance that my sister was still alive, and I actually did locate her in one of the wagons. I told her there were no more Jews, that only she and I remained, and I suggested that she convert, too. She said, "Don't talk nonsense, there are still plenty of Jews." We were transferred to an orphanage where our human dignity was restored; they taught us anew how to eat with a spoon.

I located uncles – three in the United States and two in Israel. One of them sent me papers. At first I lived with him in north Tel Aviv and afterward I moved to Kibbutz Gan Shmuel. The army didn't want to draft me, but I volunteered to serve in the Armored Corps. Afterward I studied mathematics and started to teach in Ironi Zayin high school in Tel Aviv. I met my wife in that school. She was a secretary there and later she worked in the municipality's education department. We have two children, a daughter of

48 and a son of 47, and six grandchildren.

In 1989, a delegation of teachers and principals organized a trip to Poland. I agonized over whether to go, because that country had only made my life miserable. The blood of my loved ones flows from the soil of Poland. In the end I said yes. We arrived at Auschwitz and encountered a seemingly innocent photograph of a woman holding a boy in her arms and a German soldier pointing his weapon at her. At that moment I imagined that it was my mother and I started to run like crazy. People around me didn't understand what had got into me. On the last evening of the trip, I hesitated about whether to share my experience, and in the end I raised half a finger and said, "You came here as observers, whereas I have relived everything I underwent." Afterward they came over and thanked me for sharing, from deep down in my heart. They said that thanks to me, they had gained an authentic experience.

I retired 12 years ago. Since then I have been preparing [PowerPoint] presentations that broaden people's horizons in a variety of fields, attending talks on scientific subjects, reading and also writing for the drawer [i.e., not for publication]. Every morning I would walk 10 kilometers and stop at the fitness spots in Yarkon Park or on the beach to do short power exercises. Last December a rash broke out over my whole body and I was diagnosed with jaundice. They inserted a drainage tube and complications set in, blood vessels in the liver were torn and I had a terrible hemorrhage. The whole area became infected. I was given transfusions, I was hospitalized for about 40 days. In isolation conditions, the leper ward.

In the meantime, they did a biopsy on me and discovered a fatal growth in the pancreas. The oncologist suggested chemotherapy to reduce the growth, but I understood from her that one way or the other, surgery would be impossible afterward. On top of which, the operation in itself is dangerous and disastrous, because it can damage a vital nerve and paralyze the stomach. That's why pancreatic cancer is considered almost incurable.

I weighed the options before me and made a rational decision not to undergo chemotherapy. I realized that it wouldn't do anything for me and would only turn me into a broken person. I didn't even hesitate. I did a cost-benefit analysis and reached the conclusion that chemotherapy, or any other treatment, wouldn't help me in my condition. They told me it was possible to slow down the metastasizing somewhat, but that's not a good enough argument for embittering my life. There's no purpose to it. The doctors accepted my viewpoint, even though they weren't all that comfortable with it. Today I'm very happy I didn't take their advice.

The pancreas is a ticking bomb. No one is promising me that there will be no more metastasis. I am not eager to die, but an individual is a statistical accident. I have a friend who's 30 years younger than I am, and yesterday he had a heart attack, without any advance signs. Every person is separate and distinct in his facial features, his metabolism, his population of good bacteria.

There's no connection between my clinging to life then, as a boy in the Holocaust, and my yielding today. Because then I had hope. If I had hope that I would be cured of cancer, of course I would accept treatment. I don't want to hold on to life at all costs. I don't want a hospice or a nursing home, a foreign caregiver or for the entrance to the bathroom to be specially fitted. Survival doesn't interest me. I have no desire to extort another minute in order to see another sunbeam or to hang on until this grandson completes his service and that grandson is drafted into the army.

At Ichilov Hospital, I get treatment that is mostly palliative. Something to ease pain, cannabis, maybe morphine when the time comes. I signed a document requesting that my life not be prolonged artificially. Not to be hooked up to a machine. For them to let me finish in a tranquil manner. I want to die at home. To go to sleep and not wake up.

On the axis of life there are two junctures over which we have no control: when we are born and when we die. We all have an expiry date, even if it's convenient for us to ignore it. Life itself is a terminal illness. Recognition of the principle of finality makes it easier for me to leave. After all, I'm on the final stretch of life. I'm 82, when the average is 84. I am not afraid of death, I am afraid of the agonies. I'm also infuriated by the mystery that surrounds the disease. I am ill with cancer. I have nothing to hide.

Suicide is not an option. I am not brave enough. To go to Switzerland seems to me a waste. I prefer to leave my money to my children. I hope to go on living as long as I find meaning in my life. To live is not to be occupied with peeing and kaki and checking blood sugars. The moment

psychological situations.

I have a friend who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's 10 years ago. He's not aware of what's going on around him, he doesn't recognize his family. A lump of meat. The doctor says that unfortunately he has a strong heart. The medical establishment, possibly because of all kinds of influences that come from religion, has nothing to offer him. I signed a contract by which my body will be cremated and my ashes scattered in the sea. I don't want a grave. Instead of worms making a festive meal of me, I prefer to be gourmet food for fish. My son is a bit religious and thinks that's terrible. So I asked my nephews to carry out this mission.

What is the "afterlife"? A term that was invited to deal with the paradox that "the wicked thrive and the righteous suffer." The solution is that life is eternal, that this world is only a passage to the next world, where things will be reversed. That's nonsense, of course. The absurd thing is that secular society is also not sure. Maybe, after all? Because if my body is cremated, what will be happen with my bones on the day the Messiah comes? How will the screws be reconnected?

Can a Buddhist nun plan her death?

Libat Kimche regrets the loss of contact with her family and every day she mourns for the life she should have had

I was a child prodigy. I played the cello starting at age 4. I traveled from one country to another during my musical career. It wasn't a fun kind of pressure for a little girl. It's really nice to love something and be good at it, but the level of expectations wasn't appropriate for that age. It was the adults around me – my parents, my teachers – who foisted their own expectations and dreams on a little girl. When you're fond of a little child you can see him in all his weaknesses, as he is. You will want for him everything he would wish for himself, and you won't spend your time imagining him differently and in pulling him by force toward the adults' wishes.

At 16, when I was already as tall as my parents, I informed them that I was stopping with the cello. They took it hard. After I left the cello I had all kinds of experiences: I was an ambulance driver and a flight attendant for El Al, and in the army I served as a military photographer.

I am 43 and I have been a Buddhist nun for 17 years. Already as a girl I was drawn to these ideas, and was especially interested in the issue of how to die as well as possible. To do that, I needed to learn how to live as well as possible, and what helps with that is inward observation. Today, in my situation, it sounds funny to realize that my interest in Buddhism actually came from being occupied with death. Like a type of self-fulfilling prophecy.

I visited many places in the wake of Buddhism. One of them was Italy, where I met a teacher I really connected with. The first time I met him he burst into rolling laughter that went on for minutes. Everything I said only made him laugh more. That happens sometimes, that kind of connection with Buddhist teachers who feel that they know you from previous incarnations. He died 10 years ago, and I still miss him very much. When he died it was as though the sun was extinguished. It was a terrible period in my life. I felt that everything was coming down on me at once: I became a cripple, I lost my independence and I lost the ability to function and the life I had built for myself.

My guess is that I will have a bad death. Ethically, as a Buddhist, there are values that do not allow me to choose euthanasia or unnatural ways to die. Of course suicide is out of the question. The only question in my situation is how I can help myself plan my death so that it will be as much in my control as possible. In other words, what I can do to make it the least bad. If I could, I would talk about it with my teacher. I would sit myself down bravely opposite him and say, "Okay, how does one manage something like this as a Buddhist nun?"

I have a genetic disease that I didn't know about until a very late stage – Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. It's a syndrome involving the connective tissues, a type of over-flexibility [of the skin and joints]. It's a rare disease and difficult to diagnose, so typically it is not diagnosed in a timely way. That happened to me, too. My condition deteriorated and deteriorated, and created all kinds of problems.

My body is ahead of its time, it thinks I'm an old woman of 99. I have low bone density and rheumatism. The body became confused and didn't understand how old it was supposed to be.

I was 20-something, very skinny, very quiet, articulate and had already been a nun for a few years, when I started to experience unbearable pain. When I went to doctors and complained about inexplicable excruciating pain, they told me for years that it was psychiatric and sent me to drink milkshakes. They told me, "It's very sad that we can't help

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everything revolves around my pain, there's no point to it. A life of value is a life from which one can derive enjoyment. To read a book, travel, see a play, go to a concert, take part in my singing group which meets once a month, meet with friends, visit the grandchildren. In the meantime, there's no change in my life routine. I'm not interested in doing things I haven't already managed to do. I don't like hotels and I was never one for going out on the town. I have no plans to go on a cruise or travel to Antarctica.

If I look back on my life, I have no doubt that there are junctures at which I would have behaved differently. Maybe I would have chosen a different profession. Mathematics is a bit frustrating, because if you don't remain in the academic world, there isn't much room for development. I was a teacher for 40 years, and at the end of the day I feel satisfaction from my work in education. My second [cardiac] catheterization was done by a former pupil of mine. He told me afterward, "Now I'm sure you have a good heart." As a school principal I helped children whom the establishment left by the wayside, children who were never given a chance. I was able to find a path to their souls, and many times I extricated them from difficult



Megeid Gozny

Kimche: 'Imagine the worst pain, multiply it by 10, by 10 again and again. I take painkillers, but in under-dosage. If I really relieve the pain I won't be able to meditate. The only thing that still works is my head. If I "neutralize" it, I really will have a problem.'

anorexic young women." The result was that a growth started in my hip joint, which became aggravated. It was a combination of a genetic disease that wasn't diagnosed in time, terrible negligence – medical mistakes, my mistakes. And all of that led to a situation in which my lifespan was cut in half.

When the pains started, I was simply stunned. This wasn't part of my contract with life. The contract was supposed to be fair. Incapacitation? Disease? That's not what I signed on for. I didn't have the appropriate skills to cope with it. I started to study psychology. I didn't want to accept with understanding that I was a cripple. And because my disease is genetic and degenerative, the situation got progressively worse.

During the first years I was sick, I devoted a huge amount of energy to trying to get better and trying to achieve totally unattainable goals. It's normal and universal for people with a chronic disease to go through a good few years before they stop trying to get rid of it. I experienced slow disillusionment. During the past few months, I have filled out forms with medical instructions and have retained Aley Shalechet [literally, "autumn leaves"; a secular funeral home that offers the option of cremation, in order to decide now about my burial. I am trying to influence the way I die – as much as I can.

I have had excruciating pains for 10 years. Imagine the worst physical pain you've ever had, multiply it by 10, then by 10 again, and once again by 10. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And now think how it could be possible to sleep at night, to wash, to stay sane and not bang your head against something. And there's no treatment for it. That is, I take painkillers, but constantly in under-dosage, because if I really relieve the pain I won't be able to meditate. So, on the one hand it hurts all the time; and on the other hand, the only thing that still works is my head, and if I "neutralize" it, I really will have a problem.

Meditation is the last good thing I have left, so I don't deprive myself of it by using strong painkillers. I have an image of myself in my head, and in that image I am not a cripple. It took me a great deal of time to understand that I am no longer who I was, and that my identity has also changed, along with the incapacitation and the dying. I feel that there is a person in my head who experiences everything and doesn't change. A person who is not crippled or sick or close to death.

I would really like to be remembered, but I will not be remembered. To be a person who is remembered you need to be in encounters with people, and I have not been able to leave the house for years. So I don't think about that, because it's just painful. I don't have a feeling of pride or satisfaction, because I simply feel that I've missed out hugely. I would be very happy if I were remembered as a wise, learned person. I would be happy to be remembered as a successful, beautiful woman – like I was supposed to be. But that's not going to happen.

I may sound realistic and accepting, but I am absolutely too young. The experience of frustration is infinite. I feel that my life was a waste, because I can't even quantify the number of things I wanted to do. Every day I mourn for the life that, according to the contract, I was supposed to have but which doesn't exist, or exists only in my head. I have a very deep regret for the wasted life. I feel that I've wasted life's potential. I would like to have time to read more and more books. I would like to have time to complete the degrees in psychology, I would like to have time to study medicine, I would like to study everything. Simply everything. If I could, I'd gladly do every degree in the world. I also regret not having known enough medicine to prevent the damage that was done to me, or to stop it in time. I also regret that I didn't succeed in keeping my family in the picture and didn't succeed in keeping them around me.

Disease and death scare other people very much. Friends disappear. The family disappears. Everything disappears. It's a kind of intermediate state now, I'm not living and not dead. I have been a cripple for 10 years, and seriously disabled for the past few years. And our society, afraid of death as it is, is even more afraid of serious disability. The Buddhist community is also not accompanying me at this stage. It doesn't really know how to cope with my incapacitation. And that's all right, because over time I have learned how to



Alex Levac

Marcus: 'I owe everything to my wife. We met by chance in a supermarket 25 years ago. She was a checkout girl. Two months later we had a wedding. She's been at my side for six years during great suffering. I don't want any burden to remain for her after I go.'

distinguish between the idea and the belief, and the people who uphold it.

The boundaries of my world are my apartment. Of the people who were in touch with me, only my mother is left, she is with me all the time. Because of that I came to the conclusion that I would not have a funeral. The two of us have each been the person in the other's life for many years. And many people abandoned us along the way. I don't want to have a funeral because I feel it would be superfluous for me and will cause my mother much pain. Because those who will come to it will be many people who have disappeared from our lives. They will come to mourn me, but she is the only person who will truly mourn me deeply. It will only cause her great pain – encountering those people and the painful memories that will bring. So we agreed between us that whoever dies first will not have a funeral.

For many people, the thought of life after death, or about reincarnation, offers some form of solace that helps in reaching acceptance. But not for me. That no longer occupies me. I would like to conclude with a story that's very well known in Buddhism. It's about a woman whose baby has died. For days, she walks around with it in her arms, she goes everywhere with it and refuses to bury it. The woman is sent to Buddha, and Buddha gives her a task. Your baby will come back to life if you come back with a grain of mustard from a house in which no one has died. The woman emerges optimistic and happy, clinging to the

chance that she will succeed. A few days later she returns to Buddha. She says to him: I have understood. And later she buries her baby. When she walked about with this hope, she went from house to house and in every house heard stories about death. People told her about their relatives who had died, when and how, at what age. And so she went from house to house and heard the stories, until she grasped that there is no home in which people haven't die. And that death is inevitable.

Buddha, in the most direct and respectful way, sent her to learn how to grapple with the idea of death. He knew she would not return with a grain of mustard.

'Death and I are doing a tango'

He was once a 'one-man entertainment troupe.' But gastric-bypass surgery ruined Eric Marcus' life, and every day he regrets having done it

I was a man-mountain. I was huge. The way I behaved attracted attention. It was like hanging out with a one-man entertainment troupe. I baked a lot, and cooked. And laughed a lot. I wore extra-large times six, which is more like a huge bag than a shirt. I wanted to be skinny, to get down to size 42. My excess weight made it hard for me to play with the children and run after them on the lawn.

My family actually didn't have so much trouble with my

weight. It only came from me. Being thin was the only thing I could think of. So I decided to have gastric-bypass surgery. My wife not only didn't encourage me to have the operation, she was dead against it, she sensed there was something wrong with it. She has a lot of guilt feelings for not stopping me physically. At every possible opportunity, I tell her that I am sorry for not listening to her then. I did the operation for the soul, and for my family. And those are exactly the things that got screwed up because of it.

I regret it so much, I am remorseful every day. It's a total absurdity. If you sent me back in time, I wouldn't do it again. Without thinking twice I'd go back to my former weight, because at least I would get back the joie de vivre I had. My life was aborted midway. The operation was meant to improve my quality of life, but it did the exact opposite. So you're a little bigger, and you're a little less handsome in your own eyes – but you're alive. Today I'm nothing, I'm in an abyss.

I'm Eric (Arye) Marcus, age 50, from Eilat. I worked as a nurse at a hospital for 23 years. My work was my life. Giving to people was the center of my existence. If I washed someone, there were gags in the shower. If I put a cast on a child, it was always with humor and fun. The patients loved me. It was very important for me to make people happy. There were patients in intensive care, all kinds of grandmas, and to make them happy I would help groom them, make them feel like brides in the hospital.

I remember too little of what I was before the operation, because my brain isn't working anymore from all the medication. But there is one thing I remember powerfully – a little boy I treated in the Remedia affair [in 2003, infants received Remedia baby formula that lacked vitamin B1, with disastrous results]. He arrived at the hospital and we resuscitated him over some hours. He died, and in the end I was the one who took him to the refrigerator. I carried him in an embrace when he was already dead, and that has remained engraved in my mind despite everything that happened.

I am coping with the ruinous results of the gastric-bypass surgery I had. At first, when I felt that something was wrong, I asked to be examined. I was told that these were regular post-op phenomena. But it didn't go away even after two months. Something really was wrong. A saga of operations began. I underwent 16 operations in five years.

I am nourished by a machine that I'm connected to for 12 hours every day and I am on the waiting list for an intestinal transplant. It's a very rare transplant.

I'm checking cemetery and burial costs, looking for a place. Out of total acceptance. Death and I are doing a tango. I'm constantly checking this boundary with my loved ones. The family wants to strangle me when I talk about it. It freaks my wife out, because she's afraid of being alone. She doesn't want to hear about it.

I owe everything to my wife. We met by chance in a supermarket 25 years ago. She was a checkout girl. Two months later, we had a wedding and very great love. Seven months after that we had a child. The second was born two years later.

She's been at my side for six years of great suffering. I don't want any burden to remain for her after I go. I don't want her to have to do anything. I did research to find out where every red cent is that can go to her after my death. Everything will be ready – be it expenses, savings plans, everything.

The need to organize everything for her certainly comes from my desire to correct the mistake I made, which she tried so hard to prevent. So at least she won't face chaos after I go. I'm sending faxes to the whole world to make her life a little easier.

I also asked someone once not to have surgery. My father fell ill with pancreatic cancer and the doctor persuaded him that with the operation he would live another two or three years. I tried to convince him [not to do it], but in the end I said to him, "You're sane, you're lucid, do what you want." He decided to have the operation, and died a month later.

I hope I helped him ahead of death, because I told him not to take the medications all the time but to live the life that remained: "If you feel like eating, eat; if you feel like going out, go out. Whatever you can still do – do it." Three weeks later, he died. But at least he died with dignity.

SHAMELESS

Continued from page 7

more successes in psychoanalysis – that in therapy people change, grow."

What does this woman want? Perhaps she wants to move from her present occupation, in which, she feels, democracy is gradually ceasing to exist, to one in which democracy can still be maintained: the psychoanalytic clinic.

The association between the psychoanalytic perception of people and the democratic worldview is related, in part, to the way in which psychoanalysis brings one face to face with unconscious wishes and fantasies, the sorts that nourish undemocratic regimes and which they aspire to intensify. Translated into psychoanalytic parlance, to fight for democracy means to refuse the temptations of achieving perfection, unity and calmness that characterize undemocratic forms of government.

One of the conditions for the existence of democracy is the ability of both the individual and the collective to bear guilt. Psychoanalysts do not take as self-evident people's ability to distinguish between reality and wishful thinking, or their ability to think and feel. Like democracy, psychoanalysis also sees thinking as a mental and cultural achievement that is acquired with great toil – an achievement that is susceptible to attacks from within and from without, and that requires constant maintenance, both at the individual level and the collective political level. Like democracy, psychoanalysis also explores the connection between integrity and the integration of life and death drives, and of parts of the inner world that are in conflict with one another. Like democracy, psychoanalysis furthers the distinction between "prejudice" from which it is worth liberating oneself, and the "facts of life" it is preferable to live with.

One fact of life, for example, is the knowledge that people by nature have complex relations with the truth and with pleasure. But this is not only in



Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, during happier days. The desire to apply decision-making theory to romantic relationships is touching. Mark J. Terrill/AP

the realm of politics but also in science as well, where unconscious fantasies can be identified that are inconsistent with the democratic enterprise. The history of the 20th century shows that the rise of ethnocentric political ideologies is accompanied by a partiality for scientific concepts that are biologicistic, essentialist or voluntarist to an extreme.

When to get a divorce? Scientism is one of the features of our era, but another one of the characteristics of the period is a loss of interest in the distinction between knowledge and truth. Biological psychiatry and the brain sciences are energetically cultivating the image of man as a being whose behavior is to be measured, predicted and reshaped. It's hard to be critical of the vast growth in scientific knowledge, but it's also not useful to ignore the dangers that lie in wait for democracy from the psychopharmacological culture that has seized control of the Western world. The medications industry plays a central role in the formation of the "behavioral person" as one who does not look for meaning in what he feels or thinks; in turning him into a subject who has many questions for Google and Facebook, and few questions for himself.

In one of Dan Ariely's captivating lectures, the Israeli-born behavioral economist applies his theory of decision-making to the realm of relationships. He relates what he advises for a person agonizing over whether to

divorce his wife: that he try to ignore the fact that he has been married to this woman for many years, and ask himself whether today, in the light of all that he already knows about her, he would marry her.

The popularity of decision-making theory in schools of business administration and in corporate customer-relations departments is in-built. The desire to apply it to the inner world and to romantic relationships is touching. The voluntarist psychology of the experts on decision-making insists on identifying the psychic with the cognitive, and on portraying people as though they are a beta version of a more intelligent and efficient thinking machine that's still in its developmental stages. It encapsulates an object relations theory of far-reaching implications for the connections between the individual and the state, and for interpersonal relations. "Relationship management," they call it.

One after another, figures are striding to the center stage of history who seem to have been waiting for the moment when they could leap out of Ayn Rand's writings into our life. What some of the heroes of science, culture and politics of our time have in common isn't their contempt for the law, but the contempt they harbor for guilt and for psychic pain as such. A political culture in which people are urged to cast their gaze on statistical "happiness quotients," to feel good with themselves at any price, or to

make decisions about leaving their partner on the basis of rational "data processing," is a culture that views guilt as a type of malfunction or hitch.

The psychotic self. Leaders have always shown off the psychopathic side of their personality and have known how to use moral lack of restraint not only as a means to frighten political rivals but also as an "aphrodisiac," to seduce us, the little people, into ridding ourselves of oppressive pangs of conscience and placing our trust in a "Godfather"-like leader free of conventional moral shackles. It's not only power-drunk politicians who take pride today for "ceasing to apologize" or "not believing in guilt": The behavioral individual tends to be overly fond of the grandiose and psychopathic aspect of his personality, which he dons as protective armor against any emotional contact with human feelings like weakness, dependence, guilt, shame or remorse.

It's no longer rare to encounter acerbic, ostensibly open-minded young people whose narrow range of feelings, and whose emotional difficulty in taking an interest in what goes on in their inner world, recall the world of Arnold Schwarzenegger in his roles as a superhero in dystopian action films of the end of the last century. The culture heroes of this period are also part-concrete, part-fictional personalities, trying to signal that nothing will come between them and their pleasure.

It's possible that the task of liberating humanity from the burden of the superego has succeeded over and above all expectations. Pathologies of a new type – individual, cultural and political psychologies – have become the attributes of a period in which a "good life" and guilt are perceived as being antithetical. "Among the signs of bestiality / a clear conscience is Number One," Wislawa Szymborska wrote in her poem "In Praise of Feeling Bad About Yourself" (translation: Stanislaw Baranczak and Claire Cavanagh). In a world devoid of guilt, there is only authoritarian admiration and self-love.

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