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White Genocide Fantasy and the Myth of the “Lone Wolf”

by Denis O’Keefe

National, ethnic, and religious flags—even those of our favorite sports teams—serve to unify. Displaying a flag can symbolize our membership and belonging, informing our identity and often

worldviews. But a flag can have much deeper significance, becoming a sacred or totem object, and one that necessitates action in response to persecutory

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Marc-André Cotton
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Hiroshima, Iran, and the Future of Nuclear Weapons

by Brian D’Agostino

For 20 months, the Obama administration led a consortium of the nuclear armed permanent members of the UN Security Council—

Russia, China, the UK and France—plus Germany in negotiations with Iran over the country’s nuclear pro-

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Mind’s Wisdom: Neuroplasticity and Neurointegration as Tools for Post-traumatic Growth

by Inna Rozentsvit

Is post-traumatic growth (PTG) a misnomer? Actually, it is not. Nietzsche’s expression, “What does not kill me makes me stronger” captures the soul of this phenomenon, which some people who have experienced it call a “blessed state.”

Trauma has many faces, and the expression on those ‘faces’ constitute the whole spectrum of emotions and experiences—from the world that is shattered to the emerging one that has a

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gram. In the deal that was signed this July, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran agreed to dismantle two thirds of its nuclear centrifuges, cut its stockpile of uranium by more than 98%, and give international inspectors regular access to all its nuclear facilities.

Critics of the agreement argue that some of its provisions expire after ten years, that there are gaps in the inspections regime, and that the lifting of economic sanctions—which Iran gets in exchange for compliance with the agreement—will free up \$100 billion dollars, money that can be used in part to advance Tehran's foreign policy agenda.

Now, there is an elephant in the room that neither critics nor most supporters of the Iran agreement are willing to acknowledge. The elephant is the double standard involved in the world's leading nuclear powers insisting on non-proliferation even as they cling in perpetuity to their own monopoly of the ultimate weapons of mass destruction and terror. Related to this is the remarkable silence in the West about Israel's nuclear arsenal.

While American pundits and journalists have managed to ignore this elephant, it has not escaped notice in Iran or indeed in the rest of the world's other non-nuclear states. On the occasion of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference this spring, Tehran called for a timetable for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, which is in fact a legal obligation of the United States and the other nuclear-armed signatories to the treaty. In July, a couple of weeks after the Comprehensive Joint Plan was signed in Vienna, Iran again called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, including in Israel.

It is not obvious why Russia, China, and the West are clinging to their nuclear weapons. While the weapons in theory serve as a military trump card, enabling their possessors to bully non-nuclear states, such threats have little credibility and are probably ineffective. Nor are nuclear weapons needed as a deterrent to prevent Iran or any other country from acquiring nuclear weapons; conventional military capabilities are sufficiently devastating for that purpose.

Why, then, are political leaders and a significant segment of the populations in nuclear armed states unwilling to relinquish such militarily superfluous weapons? The irrationality of such attitudes 70 years after Hiroshima cries out for psychohistorical analysis. I see three major factors at issue.

First, nuclear weapons are more than military power on steroids. They also represent the ultimate power of the universe itself—the awesome destructiveness unleashed when matter is converted to energy. As such, nuclear weapons are objects of worship, a phenomenon Robert Jay Lifton called nuclearism.

Second, as the most extreme special case of military power, nuclear weapons uphold the irrational worldview of those who idealize the militarist state. In my own research in political psychology, I found that hawk beliefs are strongly correlated with authoritarianism, which suggests origins in punitive parental introjects. In this complex, the militarist state serves as a surrogate for the idealized punitive parent. In addition, I found that for most male hawks, military power appears to uphold a macho self-image, which is a psychological factor distinct from authoritarianism.

Third, nuclear weapons play into an even more primitive complex, identification with the good object of infancy and the splitting off and projection of the bad object, a level of

the psyche explored by Melanie Klein. This may underpin the apocalyptic fantasies of many that “we” can be trusted with these weapons because “we” are Good, while “they” (in this case the Iranians) must be denied these weapons at all costs because “they” are Evil.

Here, the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is an essential corrective. In fact, the US is the only state that has ever used these heinous weapons, and historical research calls into question the benign purpose Truman gave for incinerating tens of thousands of civilians. As Richard Falk has said, if the Bomb had been developed first by the Nazis and used to annihilate European cities, nuclear weapons today would occupy a position alongside Auschwitz in the Western moral imagination.

In an imperfect world, the Iran nuclear deal is an important next step for advancing international security. In order to counteract the toxic complexes being mobilized against the agreement, progressives and moderates need to reframe the debate using psychohistorical insights and bold policy alternatives that will further enhance the security of Israel and all states in the Middle East.

Instead of pouring more weapons into the region, the great powers that negotiated the Iran deal need to bring all states in the Middle East and North Africa to a comprehensive peace conference and use every carrot and stick at their disposal to craft demilitarized security arrangements. That, in my view, is what peace-loving people throughout the world should be demanding.

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fantasies. For Freud, a totem object provides containment for unintegrated ambivalence, typically of love and hate, but in the current case of the Confederate battle flag, a multilayered split in personal and political beliefs regarding American history and the complexities of ideology and identity primarily focused on racial divides.

Dylann Roof’s hate-inspired mass shooting in a Black, historic Charleston church, killing nine congregants, has brought to the surface a larger national debate on the meaning and significance of the Confederate flag. In the months before his June 17th, 2015 killing spree, Roof posted numerous pictures on his website holding the flag in reverence, and another showing him burning the American flag. Further evidence that flags held a special importance for Roof is in another photo on his website, “The Last Rhodesian,” where he wears the flags of Rhodesia and apartheid-era South Africa.

Americans hold diametrically opposed beliefs regarding the Confederate flag, some viewing it as a symbol of hatred, oppression, white supremacy and slavery, with others viewing it as a symbol of a way of life based on independence, freedom, and anti-establishment rebellion. As one web-poster stated, “it’s a warm sight I saw every day of my childhood.” The Confederate flag was flown above the South Carolina Statehouse along with the American flag until Governor Nikki

Haley and the state legislature had it removed in the weeks after the Charleston shooting.

An analysis of the ideologies we attach to our cultural objects, including what is revered and what is denied, can provide significant insight into defensive fantasies and the actions they inspire. Such an analysis provides a perspective on Dylann Roof and other hate crime perpetrators, dispelling their depiction as lone wolf terrorists and showing them as integral parts of a much larger white supremacist movement.

From an object relations perspective, to maintain our internal psychic world, we construct representations of external reality through projection and introjection. Our belief systems are dynamic processes in which, as Seivers (1994) put it, “part of [our] introjected objects are our previous projections and vice versa.” For the defensive process to be effective, group members must reincorporate those projected states, which find expression in attitudes and behavior. In addition to using cultural objects to represent split off aspects of ourselves, we delegate to individual members of our group the role of acting out our projections, enabling us to vicariously experience our projected states as enacted in external reality. Delegates act out ambivalent feelings common to all members of the group, but which the majority wishes to deny.

I believe these concepts are relevant for understanding the Charleston mass shooting. During a period of charged race relations, much of White America delegated to Dylann Roof the role of acting out widespread violent fantasies, a

delegate role he evinced in his manifesto, entitled “I have no choice.” He wrote, “Someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.” Roof further told authorities that his plan was to start a race war and on his website he focused on the victimization of whites by blacks. He told parishioners that Black people were “taking over the country” and that Whites were under attack by Blacks across the globe.

It is worth noting that roughly half of the so called “lone wolf” attacks in the United States since 1970 have been carried out by White supremacists. Users of the largest White supremacist website, Storm-front, have been responsible for nearly 100 murders in the last five years (Cohen, 2015). There is an extensive history of attacks on black churches in the South, six of which have mysteriously erupted in flames since the shooting. As I am writing this, four Confederate flags were reportedly placed outside Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the historic congregation once led by Martin Luther King Jr.

Membership in white supremacist groups has ballooned since 9/11 and further increased with the election of President Obama. The day following Obama’s inauguration in January 2009, “lone wolf” Keith Luke, an internet-radicalized white supremacist, killed three African immigrants after handcuffing and raping one. Luke told police that he was “fighting extinction” of the White race and his goal was to

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“kill non-white people.” The persecutory and apocalyptic fantasies, a projection of his own genocidal intent, left him free at least momentarily of moral culpability for brutalizing and murdering his victims. But more to the point, like Dylann Roof he can be viewed as the delegate of a much larger white supremacist community harboring similar persecutory fantasies necessitating action.

Luke’s and Roof’s beliefs of white extinction seem laughable at first. But fantasies gain momentum and power when shared, and Luke and Roof were by no means alone, nor did they originate the notion of white genocide. That distinction arguably goes to Robert Whitaker, a segregationist and self-proclaimed college professor, Capitol Hill and Reagan Administration staffer, and current vice-presidential candidate for the American Freedom Party. Like Dylann Roof, Whitaker hails from Columbia, South Carolina.

In 2006, Whitaker published on his website, “Bob’s Underground Graduate Seminar” (BUGS), a short White supremacist rant now propagated by his self-styled “swarm” of followers, the “BUGSers.” Known as “The Mantra,” this manifesto spins current attempts to address race relations through “assimilation” as an “obvious genocide against my race” and labels anti-racism a “code word” for anti-white. He hints that the “final solution for the black problem” is the geographic segregation of races. He begins his diatribe with “ASIA FOR THE ASIANS, AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS, WHITE COUNTRIES FOR EVERYBODY!”

One group of Whitaker’s devotees, the White Genocide Project, has likely been responsible for roadside billboards in the south equating diversity and multiculturalism with White genocide.

When one of the billboards was quickly taken down, Whitaker called those responsible “a bunch of shirt-tail Hitlers,” clearly indicating his propensity for projection. Whitaker’s narrative equates diversity with white genocide, anti-racist whites with sick “self-haters,” and anti-Black racism with self-defense. The Mantra provides the ever growing white supremacy community with a shared meaning, coherent ideology, and justification for racism and even anti-Black violence (Gilsinan, 2015). Roof and others in this community regard Rhodesia and South Africa as warnings of an apocalyptic future in which Whites are disenfranchised and victimized by Blacks, a specter that inspires their call to action in online and other forums.

What are denied in this new narrative, of course, are the issues of power, privilege and the history of crimes perpetrated by Whites in the service of maintaining power. Overt racism in American culture has been rejected by the larger society, while being delegated to fringe groups that act out the delegators’ violent fantasies even while enabling them to deny racist intent. With increasing attempts to bring awareness to the inherent racism in our judicial, educational, healthcare, occupational, child welfare, and other systems, this new narrative was required to reinforce or justify the splitting and maintain positive self-regard and a sense of morality. Casting the perpetrators as victims allows for the thinly veiled expression of the violent projections of a large segment of the US population.

Roof’s racial, hate-spewing text and call to action, legitimized by an obsession with Black-on-White crime, finds a home in an online subculture promulgating the White genocide group fantasy, which grows in strength when shared among true believers. Since rejection and persecution by an unbelieving world are an integral part of the fantasy, believers are not required

to sell the narrative to the mainstream. Whites believing in multiculturalism and anti-racism are cast as self-haters and enemies. The persecutory and apocalyptic fantasy necessitates action.

Dylann Roof is no ‘lone wolf,’ at least in the sense that he did not feel alone and that his murderous act resonated with and fed the racist fantasies of millions. Bob Whitaker acknowledges that some of his followers, like Roof, will resort to violence. While denying having any influence over Roof and stating “I’m against cold-blooded murder,” in the same breath, Whitaker states “when you have a screaming mob outside, most people are going to start screaming, but others respond with shooting” (Joseph, 2015).

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new meaning and a new life worth living. Some of us who deal with the horrific aftermath of trauma were at first appalled by the idea that trauma can be perceived as a stimulus of any kind of “growth” or any kind of “good.” Many psychoanalysts did not accept PTG and other concepts coming from the so-called “positive psychology” field, which they perceived as superficial, “behavioral,” and not indicative of lasting change in the internal world of their patients and clients. But research reveals that in addition to producing negative effects, trauma often activates positive mechanisms of resilience and coping. PTG goes further...

The idea of PTG was pioneered by Calhoun and Tedeschi (in their 1998 book, *Posttraumatic growth: Positive change in the aftermath of crisis*), to address positive psychological change, which they viewed as the *mind's wisdom*, which might occur in individuals who suffer any type of trauma—developmental, relational/attachment, or physical. PTG happens *in the context of and despite* the struggle of processing pain and loss. It includes *five main factors*: 1) relating more to others, and with greater compassion; 2) finding new possibilities in life (such as new roles and new people); 3) appreciating personal strength; 4) spiritual change; and 5) a deeper appreciation of life and its meaning (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2004, *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence*, *Psychological Inquiry* 15(1), pp. 1-18).

While some PTG researchers perceive it as a “special” type of resilience, and some feel that resilience is a huge factor in developing PTG,

the original PTG pioneers described a complicated and even *inverse relationship* between these constructs. The explanation – from a bio “logical” perspective – sounds simple: more resilience means more ability to cope and bounce back to the previous state of being, with fewer struggles. But it is *through this struggle* that one’s mind finds new ways of being and new opportunities; and this is called PTG.

Calhoun and Tedeschi urged clinicians not to expect that everyone can

To understand PTG from a “philosophical” traumatology perspective, one can employ the concepts of *accommodation* to traumatic experience through an “operating schema” such as “bad things happen to good people...life is not just and perfect” versus *assimilation* of trauma into one’s life’s fabric through a schema such as “bad things happen to bad people, so I deserve what happened...” Those who accommodate to trauma rather than assimilate it are more likely to experience PTG. This making meaning of trauma is

One day, in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful. — Sigmund Freud

A single event can awaken within us a stranger totally unknown to us. — Antoine de Saint-Exupery

So next time you're faced with something that's unexpected, unwanted and uncertain, consider that it just may be a gift. — Stacey Kramer (brain cancer survivor)

achieve PTG, and to be respectful of pitfalls and difficulties of the trauma recovery process. So, what makes one more likely to achieve growth in the aftermath of trauma? Observations of various groups of people (e.g., cancer patients, rape survivors, combat veterans, survivors of 9/11, parents who lost their child to suicide, other bereaved adults, Holocaust survivors, people with chronic medical conditions, etc.) showed that some personality traits are more associated with PTG than others. For example, positive affect, openness to experience (otherwise called intellectual curiosity), and extraversion are more associated with PTG, while “neuroticism” (characterized by emotional instability and low tolerance for stress and aversive stimuli) is negatively related to PTG.

called “cognitive-emotional valuing and re-assessment processing.”

Neurobiologically speaking, PTG is based on two systemic mind-brain processes, neuroplasticity (NP)—the ability to change via making new connections and associations—and neurointegration (NI), the ability to “holistically” integrate those changes and to produce new interpretations and new “meanings” regarding what has happened. Neurointegration occurs in many dimensions of the mind-brain system: between the left and the right hemisphere; between our “reptile,” “mammalian,” and “human” parts of the “triune” brain; between the body and the mind; between unconscious and conscious, and more. So, in neurobiological terms, when we consciously

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integrate our responses to traumatic events using our “human”/verbal/thinking part of the brain (instead of our fight-and-flight and fear based reactive “non-verbal” brain), we are on the road to recovery and/or PTG. This occurs, for example, during psychotherapy, storytelling, and reaching out to a friend.

We are “hardwired” for capacities of NP and NI by the mere fact of belonging to Homo sapiens, Latin for “wise men.” NP and NI are critical in processing trauma, in learning, in making changes in psychotherapy, and in loving and simply “being.” I

believe that a neuro-psycho-biological understanding of trauma and PTG can be a valuable tool, not only for neuroscientists but for all mental health practitioners, in aiding our patients and clients to reach the “blessed” state of PTG. As the famous economist and non-neuroscientist John Maynard Keynes said once, “When my information changes, I alter my conclusions. What do you do, sir?”



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Such a public statement carries strong emotional overtones resulting from the close interweaving of past and present perceptions—a regressive process Dr Vamik Volkan has termed “time collapse.” Fears and intrapsychic defenses associated with a past traumatic experience tend to resurface when triggered by a contemporary menace such as social unrest or economic downturn, often reactivating a sense of victimization. In such a case, current perceptions and traumatic memory become inextricably interwoven into a seamless totality.

On an individual level, the feeling of being stuck in a dead end and the alternation between hopelessness and rage directed at escape may be rooted in repressed perinatal trauma, as explored by Stanislav Groff and others. During prolonged and obstructed labor, the experience of the infant being stuck in the birth canal is extremely traumatic for the infant.

Indeed, if the newborn doesn’t heal by fostering a deep maternal bond in the following months—notably through breast-feeding, which is rarely encouraged in Greece—he or she is likely to struggle in defining his or her own independent self. In times of great collective stress, such as wars and depressions, traumatic perinatal memories may resurface for millions of people, fueling group fantasies.

While each individual develops his or her own coping mechanism for dealing with their personal birth trauma, members of groups also share common representations of painful past events, as discussed by Vamik Volkan. In Greece, austerity has fuelled a feeling of being under siege that relates to current reality but may also re-stimulate very deep and old traumatic womb memories.

According to Molly Green, a professor of Hellenic studies teaching in Thessaloniki, “For the people who voted ‘no’ [to the July 5 bailout referendum], it was, once again ‘we’re being pushed around by other European countries as though we’re not a part of

Europe” (David Graham, “How Greece Became European” www.theatlantic.com/7/7/2015). The same amalgamation of current reality and traumatic affect was voiced by 28-year old Anny, an Athenian graphic designer, immediately after the public referendum: “I voted ‘no’ because I would rather walk blindfolded toward the unknown than vote ‘yes’ and walk toward what I know is disaster” (Tania Karas, “Why Greek Youth Voted ‘no’,” www.huffingtonpost.com/7/6/2015).

Historical Struggle for Differentiation

Greece’s tortured ambivalence about membership in the Eurozone raises deep questions of national identity. To understand such ambivalence, let us turn to the issue of identity formation. According to Vamik Volkan, both individuals and large groups struggle with differentiation, especially when their self-images are challenged. As stated earlier, unhealed collective traumas are then prone to re-emerge as indicators of unintegrated parts of

the group's identity, as with borderline and narcissistic patients.

In this perspective, it should be noted that Greece never fully completed individuation as a modern state. Gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in the late 1820s, the Greeks were forced to accept a Bavarian prince as their new monarch. The Great Powers of the time helped secure the Greek borders but made it clear that the newcomer would never be in position to compete in the European arena. Interviewed by *Newsweek*, actor Antonis Kafetzopoulos put it this way: "We always tried to compromise between the old Ottoman establishment and modern Europe" (Adam LeBor, "The Greek crisis reveals a nation crushed by ancient history," www.europe.newsweek.com, 7/7/2015).

In the 19th century, Grecophiles such as English poet Lord Byron—whose death in the Greek War of Independence was romanticized—helped plant Hellenism as the nation's foundation myth centered on the glory of antiquity. Western Europeans manufactured a "fantasy Greece" largely based on idealization of ancient Athens as the "cradle of

democracy." Today, the average Greek citizen still beholds Europe with fear and suspicion as their country never quite made a transition to modernity.

This troubled relationship between Greece and Europe, which goes back nearly two hundred years, was enabled by European lenders. After independence, the Greek rebels didn't repay European loans granted to fight the Ottomans, but creditors poured more money into the country in 1832 when King Otto was installed. Half a century later, Greece over-borrowed in foreign markets and defaulted again in 1893. Even back then, an "International Committee for Greek Debt Management" was formed to force reforms.



graffiti in the streets of Athens displaying womb and traumatic birth symbols

What is to be done? However irresponsible Greek governments may have been in the past, this has not been the case with the two most recent bailouts. As Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman has pointed out, Athens faithfully enacted the austerity policies demanded by its creditors and, through no fault of its own, the policies did not work. Now the gods in Brussels and Berlin have imposed a third round of austerity policies that are no more likely to succeed than the previous ones.

Believing they must remain in the Eurozone at all costs, the current Greek government and apparently the majority of its citizens are accepting this fate. Since German and other European elites are the architects of these horrendous policies, with the complicity of their national populations, psychohistorians must examine their aggression and what motivates it if we hope to understand the recurring Greek debt crisis.

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Reflections on the Greek Bailout

The Agony of Greece

by Marc-André Cotton

On August 14, 2015, the Greek parliament passed and Eurozone finance ministers approved a new package of loans and neoliberal “reforms” that will keep Greece in the Eurozone, at least for now. A day later, The International Monetary Fund warned that the loans are not sustainable without further debt relief, but Germany continues to oppose such measures. In this reflection from Europe, the IPA’s International Vice President places this debt crisis in historical perspective and examines how it appears to be re-stimulating perinatal trauma and producing what Vamik Volkan calls “time collapse.”

At the crack of dawn on July 13, 2015, after more than 17 hours of talk, European leaders announced a deal that would keep Greece in the Eurozone. Conceding a further swath of austerity measures and economic reforms, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras opened the door for a third three-year bailout intended to keep the country’s struggling economy alive. Three days later, a large majority of Greek members of Parliament backed the internationally mandated austerity measures—many of which had been rejected by voters in a public referendum. A month later, a more detailed agreement based on this preliminary one was finalized and approved by Greece and the Eurozone finance ministers

As Greece’s debt stands around €320 billion—a staggering 180 percent of the country’s annual gross domestic product—up to €50

billion worth of sold-off Greek assets will be transferred to an independent fund based in Athens showing that the radical leftist government has now acquiesced to privatization. Reforming the pension system will impose huge costs on those who want to retire earlier than 67 but will eventually save 1% of GDP in 2016 according to Troika lenders. Increasing Value Added Taxes will hit the tourism industry that has so far benefited from a 30% discount. On top of that, Greece will have to introduce “quasi-automatic spending cuts” if it deviates from primary surplus targets fixed by creditors at 1% in 2015, rising to 3.5% by 2018.

To adopt the drastic austerity measures demanded by its creditors, Tsipras found himself at odds with the left within his own party, but got the support of the former ruling party New Democracy, as well as the rightwing Independent Greeks. European leaders for their part were preoccupied with “trust,” as Greece has repeatedly failed to meet its financial obligations. Germany and France have striven to present a united front to avert an open split at Europe’s core but tensions remain because of different philosophical views on such matters as debt in northern and southern Europe. For the Eurozone to have lost Greece, Socialist French President François Hollande said, would have been to lose “the heart of our civilization.”

Cursing the Gods

If human affairs for Aeschylus and Sophocles were the plaything of the gods on Mount Olympus, the fate of

Greece today is in the hands of European financial elites in Brussels and Berlin. Former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis reflected on this externally imposed reality and its psychological effects long before his January nomination and subsequent attempts to implement Syriza’s anti-austerity program. In an *ABC News 24* interview by Leigh Sales, Varoufakis stated “there is no power, no force within the Greek economy” (www.abc.net.au, 6/26/2012). He then further suggested:

This is our Great Depression. Not only in an economic sense, but also in a psychological sense. Greeks are in a catatonic state. One moment in a state of rage, another, this is a typical case of manic depression. There are no prospects. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. There are sacrifices, but nobody gets a feeling that these are sacrifices that take the form of some kind of investment in turning the corner. This is the problem when you are stuck in a Eurozone which is really badly designed, which is collapsing and which does not give opportunities to its flimsier parts to escape through some kind of redemptive crisis.

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