

Psychiatry and the Survival of Man

“Further technological and scientific advances will be of no avail unless we can develop the moral capacity to utilize them constructively for the benefit of all men.”

by JUDD MARMOR

Does mankind have a future? Our planet has always had problems, but never before in its history has man's very existence hung so precariously in the balance. Our air, water, and food are all becoming increasingly polluted from by-products of technology; our forests and wildlife are steadily being encroached upon by the relentless growth of cities and population; our limited mineral wealth is rapidly being depleted; and over all looms the shadow of possible nuclear annihilation.

Why have we reached this frightening impasse? Most people agree that the problem is not in the nature of our technology but in the nature of man. However, the consensus stops there. Some blame our difficulties primarily on the biological nature of man. The essential tenet of this theory is that man is possessed of an instinct for aggression that spontaneously and persistently seeks an outlet. Not surprisingly, considering the state of the world, this view of man's nature has received renewed impetus in recent years, particularly in the writings of Robert Ardrey, Desmond Morris, and Konrad Lorenz. In a world in which hostility and destructiveness seem ubiquitous, it is reassuring to be told that this is an inevitable aspect of our biological inheritance, since such reassurance provides absolution for the guilt that most people carry with them as an outgrowth of their aggressive fantasies and impulses.

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The fact remains, however, that man alone, of all the animal species, destroys his own kind so wantonly and on so large a scale. Even if the roots do lie in our biological nature, we still must explain this unique difference between man and other species. More importantly, in the long annals of man's inhumanity to his fellow man, there are also individuals and groups who have transcended this so-called animal nature to behave in ways that have reflected the most noble aspirations of the human spirit. Our explanations of man's behavior must also be able to encompass the reasons for these differences.

In recent years psychiatric theory has begun to recognize that parents are not isolated reactors but are part of a larger system whose values and imperatives they consciously or unconsciously purvey to their children. Personality development takes place at the core of a series of concentric, interacting spheres of influence, beginning with the nuclear family and extending outward to include the community, the nation, and the world. From the moment of conception, the growing embryo is subjected to vitally important external influences—influences that are nutritional, biochemical, endocrinological, and physical. The effects of poverty, disease, physical trauma, and environmental pollution continue to be operative when the infant completes the gestational period and emerges into the outer world. Protein deficiency, disease, cultural deprivation, and the kinds of child neglect that ensue from lives warped by despair and frustration may leave ego defects from which the developing child may never fully recover. But when we examine the complex acculturation process during which children are exposed to the values and ex-

pectations of what we euphemistically continue to call civilization, a more complete answer to our current dilemma begins to emerge.

It has often been argued that man's institutions are an outgrowth of various aspects of man's biological nature. Indeed, such arguments have been used not only to “justify” various contemporary institutions but to raise doubts about whether they can ever be significantly changed. Clearly, man's genetic constitution is a significant factor in shaping his institutions. But attempting to explain the development of social institutions primarily on the basis of man's biological nature is simplistic. One has only to note the enormous diversity of human cultural patterns to recognize that other variables must be involved—such variables as climate, terrain, availability of food and water, safety of the environment, and density of population. It is in the interaction of man's biological needs with such factors that his institutions have emerged and have been adaptively shaped. However, once these institutions have been formed, they acquire a life of their own, a functional autonomy, so to speak, by virtue of which they thenceforth play a profoundly important role in shaping the personalities of human beings who grow up in their sphere of influence. Man shapes his institutions, but he is also shaped by them, and unless this transactional relationship is understood, the true nature of the complexities underlying many of our contemporary problems will continue to elude us.

It is at this interface between personality and the institutions of our society that I believe we find the most significant challenge for psychiatry in the future of man. There is nothing more important that psychiatry can contribute than to identify those in-

stitutional factors that are so shaping the personalities of most contemporary men and women as to render them resistant to the fundamental changes that must take place to insure man's survival. Unless we can recognize these factors and find ways of modifying them, nothing else that psychiatrists can contribute—psychotherapies, mental health centers, psychobiological researches—will matter very much, for man will almost certainly be doomed.

It seems to me that too many commentators on the current human scene have tended to attribute our problems to defects in individual personalities. Thus, there is much talk about strengthening the moral fiber of our youth, restoring the influence of the family, or reinforcing our religious teachings. I believe these approaches miss the mark precisely because the problems threatening our survival lie not in our individual psychopathologies but rather in our socially sanctioned, ego-syntonic group values. It is not the "defectives" among us but we, the "normal" ones, who constitute the problem—all of us, the pillars of the community, the state, and the church, with our shared and consensually validated group attitudes. It is we, the "normal" people, who continue to fight wars, cut down forests, pollute lakes and rivers, poison the atmosphere, destroy wildlife, discriminate against minorities, and pursue profits—we, the "mentally healthy" people, not the world's neurotics or psychotics.

It is in this context that John Gardner's perceptive comment that one of the main reasons it is so difficult to change our institutions is that we ourselves are part of what needs changing becomes understandable. There is a deep resistance in most of us against the changing of fundamental institutions in our society, because our basic personalities—our needs, our expectations, our very language and perceptions—have been so profoundly shaped by those very institutions.

Let us look briefly at three major institutions—all sacred cows in our contemporary culture—whose influences on man, I believe, have become seriously maladaptive in terms of his survival. I am not implying that these are the only ones that present us with prob-

lems but merely that they are important representative examples.

Consider first the institution of free enterprise with its profit system. There is no doubt that this system has challenged the individual, as probably no other economic system has done, to put his best foot forward in the struggle for existence. Whatever creativity, ingenuity, and aggressive potential he possessed were likely to be stimulated and rewarded. This was particularly true in the frontier era. Today, however, the frontiers have largely disappeared. Those that remain are accessible mainly to people who already have more than their share of economic, technological, or scientific capability. Although social mobility still exists in principle, in practice it is essentially unavailable to the underprivileged millions in our nation, as well as to the vast majority of the rest of mankind who are trapped, generation after generation, in an inexorable matrix of prejudice and poverty. Out of that matrix disproportionate amounts of disease, delinquency, crime, violence, mental disorder, and social unrest continually emerge to threaten us all. Clearly, a rational and enlightened self-interest should propel us all to take vigorous steps to remedy such pathogenic inequities. Why don't we do so?

A significant part of the answer lies in how our personalities have been shaped by the institution of free enterprise. In a society in which the securi-

ty of an individual and his family depends on his ability to acquire material goods in free competition with his fellow man, patterns of intrasocial aggression and selfish self-aggrandizement among most members of that society are inevitable, no matter what kind of Judaeo-Christian ethic, or its equivalent, is built into the acculturation of its children. The reason for this is basically a simple one. Man is an organism with a unique capacity to adapt to his environment. In that adaptive process, one factor almost always takes precedence over all others: the need to survive. In a free enterprise system, survival depends on the ability to compete aggressively, and those who are able to do so most effectively and with the fewest compunctions are likely to be rewarded with the greatest material success, as well as prestige and power.

Psychiatrists have long noted that there are glaring contradictions between ethical teachings on the one hand and the aggressive behavior that our free enterprise system seems to require on the other. Many patients psychiatrists work with suffer precisely because they have difficulty in reconciling these conflicting forces. Most so-called normal people, however, do not suffer from such conflicts; they have adapted successfully to the survival requirements of our society. The ubiquitous aggression Freud noted reflects that adaptive success. People cheat, lie, claw, and scramble—politely or impolitely—to "get ahead," and ethical considerations, if they exist, are usually relegated to the logic-tight niches of Sunday church services.

Those who achieve some modicum of success in this competitive struggle cling tenaciously to their gains, since in an individualistic society there is no guarantee, should they lose their security, that the society will take care of them beyond the most marginal subsistence. By the same token, those have-nots in our society who have not been reduced to apathetic dependency are constantly struggling to find the security that has eluded them, by honest and peaceful means when possible or by dishonest or violent ones when others fail. The steady rise in our national crime rate, the recurrent out-

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Genocide in East Pakistan

The most fundamental of all rights—the right of a man to come to the aid of a fellow human being—is now being denied with a degree of official arrogance seldom displayed in recent history.

The people of East Pakistan, who are still suffering from homelessness and hunger caused by the tidal waves of less than a year ago, are now caught up in a man-made disaster. Their land has become a locked-in arena of authorized slaughter. Communications with the outside world have been reduced almost to the vanishing point. Those who have offered emergency medical aid or other help have been told to stay out.

The present situation has its remote origins in the division of the Indian subcontinent into two nations in 1947. The movement for independence from Great Britain had been complicated and imperiled by the existence of Hindu and Moslem blocs. Great Britain had fostered the concept of a partitioned subcontinent in which India would be predominantly Hindu and Pakistan would be predominantly Moslem. For a long time, Gandhi and Nehru had opposed partition, believing it imperative for both religious orders to be accommodated within a single large national design. Gandhi and Nehru withdrew their opposition to partition, however, when it appeared certain that national independence might otherwise be indefinitely delayed.

The design for partition called for two nations. Actually, three nations

emerged. For Pakistan was partitioned within itself, into East and West. The Western part was larger geographically and became the capital. The Eastern part was more populous and richer in resources. The units lay more than 1,000 miles apart.

In order to comprehend the geographical anomaly this physical separation represented, one has only to imagine what would have happened if Maine and Georgia had decided to form a separate nation, Maorgia, with practically the whole of the United States lying in between. Let us further suppose that the capital of the new nation would have been Augusta, Northern Maorgia, while most of the people and resources would have been in Southern Maorgia. The result would have been an administrative, political, and economic shambles. What has happened in Pakistan roughly fits that description. Further compounding the situation are the severe cultural and historic differences between Punjabi (West) and Bengali (East) societies.

For a time, the peoples of East and West Pakistan were held together by the spiritual and political exhilaration of a new nationalism. But the underlying difficulties grew more pronounced and visible year by year. The people of East Pakistan chafed under what they felt was West Pakistan's latter-day version of British colonialism. They claimed they were not being represented in proportion to their numbers in either high posts or policies of government. They charged they were being exploited economically, fur-

nishing labor and resources without sharing fairly in the profits from production. They pointed to the sharp disparity in wages and living conditions between East and West.

It was inevitable that the disaffection should reach an eruptive stage. There is no point here in detailing the facts attending the emergence of political movements seeking self-rule for East Pakistan. All that need be said is that the central government at Islamabad finally did agree to submit self-rule propositions to the East Pakistan electorate. The result of the general election was an overwhelming vote in favor of self-rule. The central government at Islamabad not only failed to respect this popular decision, but ordered in armed troops to forestall implementation. The official slaughter began on March 26th.

A few documented episodes:

1) Tanks and soldiers with submachine guns and grenades seized Dacca University early in the morning on March 26. All students residing in Iqbal Hall, the dormitory center, were put to death. The building was gutted by shells from tanks.

2) One hundred and three Hindu students residing in Jagannath Hall of Dacca University were shot to death. Six Hindu students were forced at gunpoint to dig graves for the others and then were shot themselves.

3) Professor C. C. Dev, widely respected head of the Department of Philosophy, was marched out of his home to an adjacent field and shot.

4) The last names of other faculty members who were killed or seriously wounded: Minirussaman, Guhathakurta, Munim, Naqui, Huda, Innasali, Ali.

5) Central government troops forced their way into Flat D of Building 34 at the university, seized Professor Muniru Zaman, his son, his brother (employed by the East Pakistan High Court), and his nephew, and marched the group to the first-floor foyer, where they were machine-gunned.

6) A machine gun was installed on the roof of the terminal building at Sadarghat, the dock area of Old Dacca. On March 26, all civilians within range were fired upon. After the massacre, the bodies were dragged into buses. Some were burned. Some were dumped into the Buriganga River, adjacent to the terminal.

7) On the morning of March 28, machine guns were placed at opposite