



PSYCO - SEMANTICS, ADULT EMOTION AND WAR

On Chisholm's 'Diagnosis' of and 'Prescription' for internecine Aggression, and how Semantography will fill that 'Prescription'.

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Chisholm has argued for simplified general teaching of psychology (1) and Bliss, with this end in view, for popular semantic analysis (using his Semantography (2)) of the concepts of psychologists - including that confident school of psychologists, the men ( and perhaps less obtrusively the women ) 'in the street'. I hope to take up Bliss's challenge to some extent in the near future, and meanwhile would add the following four reinforcements to his article submitted herewith (Semantography Series No. 85).

1. Evidence that personal psycho-semantic concepts can influence emotional maturity.

(a) Psycho-analytic theory of maturation. "Man's delayed infancy" (3) is apparent in his hairless, snoutless and other 'embryonic-anthropoid' structural features (4) and in his marked, prolonged dependance on his elders.

Freud believes (3) an old male drives his sons from his harem in jealousy; they unite to kill him, then fight each other till one is master. The cycle recurs till the brothers get a 'conscience', in post-mortem obedience to their father refuse to marry or kill one of their blood group. This basic element in human conflict has been elsewhere supposed to be inherited in a racial unconscious but can be kept going by aggressive reaction to extreme dependance on the family group: "...prolonged helplessness of the infant...furthers...the process of learning. But...increases the importance of external danger as well as that of those objects that offer protection, to a degree unknown among the lower animals ...Although we anticipate...aggressive instinctual impulses in all people, we cannot conclude that one...expression of these impulses, making war, for example, should be inevitable in the history of man. The expression...is determined by factors which change during the course of generations...Changes in the form of neuroses, in occidental civilisation during the last generation, suggest that the deep structure of the personality was modified by cultural conditions" (5). In particular, Freudian theory and its repercussions have had this effect on twentieth century neurotic patterns in the opinion of one training analyst (6). "...goals of primitive societies are by no means conditioned by their environment or by practical considerations. They are a series of solutions...for the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal conflicts inherent in the infancy situation...to regain the 'paradise lost' of infancy" - modern culture too, inventions and so on, are just creation of 'substitute objects' (3). "The way in which the child learns to choose and recognize objects, and the way in which these infantile object-relations, through repetitions, displacements, reversions and so on, influence decisively the love-relations of the adult as well as his social relationships in professional and political life, constitute one of the major themes of analytical experience"(5)

(b) Man is amenable to cure of neurotic behaviour of types not curable in animals. This he may owe to his capacities for introspection, insight, foresight, hindsight, communication and social evolution of concepts. "General semantics, becomes indispensable for medicine in general, and for psychiatry, mental hygiene and education in particular...a new non-aristotelian system of orientation, which

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affects every branch of science and life. The separate issues involved are not entirely new...a system which is workable, teachable and so elementary that it can be applied to children, is entirely new...The prevalent and constantly increasing general deterioration of human values is an unavoidable consequence of the crippling misuse of neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic mechanisms...we are concerned with the sanity of the race, including particularly methods of prevention...we are building up for the first time a positive theory of sanity...(14).

Bliss has managed to do justice to this new discipline, to simplify it further and even to modify its basic tenets in some ways for the better.

Aggressive behaviour in animals seems related to overdependence on man or other stresses which cannot be dealt with by the 'immature' reasoning capacities of the animal. For example: Farmers have told me that it is dangerous to annoy a sow with young or to allow a boar in the pen with a young litter lest the piglets be cannibalized. Local (Sydney) newspapers within the last twelve months or so have reported (i) zoo officials had to segregate father of a newborn giraffe on account of 'jealous' illtreatment of his offspring; (ii) a small fox-terrier, hit by a vehicle, raced up several storeys, howled on a high ledge, and before rescuing firemen got near, hurled itself to its doom. Four pups fed artificially were more restless, spent more time chewing things and each other (sometimes till their chewed ears were sore), and less time playing co-operatively, than litter-mates fed naturally, and this effect was grossest in two who were fed as rapidly as possible from a bottle, and who gained less weight, though fed the same amounts of nearly the same food as the rest of the litter (7). The horse or dog with a "wicked streak" is commonly acknowledged to have got it by "bad training". Few dogs will eat dog flesh if they can smell it, according to Sherrington (8) but Girden finds some are induced to do so by hunger or habituation (8). Nutritive stresses may play a part also in the infantophagia of some species (8). Deprivations, social or chemical, incident in civilized communities may be a factor, as well as 'man's delayed infancy', in unhealthy group behaviour. But as this delayed infancy gives him the capacity to overcome chemical deprivations (through the sciences of nutrition, agriculture, etc.) it also gives him the capacity to learn by the experiences of previous generations in social sciences and eventually to modify his culture purposefully on a comprehensive scale, instead of passively absorbing its benefits and passing on minor mundane embellishments. Such wholesale modification of culture are our main criteria of new cultures emerging (as perhaps under Nazi or Communist ideologies), and if we can develop a community free of these 'Oedipal conflicts', of this 'load of the conviction of sin', we may well enter on a new era of enlightened optimism.

## 2. General ignorance of emotional needs.

There is a still "a lack of conviction on the part of governments, social agencies, and the public that mother-love in infancy and childhood is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health". (9) "...historic record has brought us much too little data on the question of how, in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance of the Fifteenth Century, etc., the feeding, weaning and toilet training of the infant was managed, or...the child's sexual and aggressive drives." (5).

## 3. The simplified Semantics and Logic ("categorical thinking" (10)) of Bliss can be used to simplify expression of psychologic principles.

I have found this in superficial psychotherapy for persons of limited intelligence. The need can be put thus: "A diagnosis once made...further study is with too many at an end. Over 200 years ago Dr. South tried to check this 'fatal imposture and force of words' by showing how 'the generality of mankind is governed by words and names,' not by things as they are, but as they are called - in a word, by 'verbal magic'.

And yet in a groping science like medicine...naming every step forward is peculiarly necessary. It is the condition of securing the step itself, and of guiding the after-comers...New trails shorter, easier and better, may indeed be discovered...But even then good sign-posts...will be helpful for strangers, and some of the old names will never be discarded...

Our modern language of medicine is unique in that it is made up of the unchanged and undigested materials and relics used and contributed during its entire history. The persisting substratum is Latin, upon which has been placed a mass of pseudo-greek words not physiologically created or grown by natural philologic

methods, but springing Minervalike from the brains of thousands of modern Jupiters ...a highly variegated medievalism that has, indeed never ended...The result is a strange hodge-podge of the medical language of two or more thousand years and of many special national tongues, in mechanic, not chemic mixture, with modern sounds and symbols, the whole amazingly heterogeneous and cacophonous...a huge unassimilated philologic mass, many times greater than it should be, the despair of medical students and of the makers of dictionaries." (11)

Even if this mass were digested, "words are good, but they are not the best. The best is not to be explained by words. Even in science we cannot really know anything, it has always to be done." (12).

"There is an economical way out of this dilemma through the use of engineering (more strictly, 'physico-mathematical') method. We simply make functional descriptions of relationship-in-action, with diagrams if possible. They have the advantage of...corresponding to space-time actualities" (13). Bliss has outshone the last-quoted in simplification and comprehensiveness in this technique.

4. More indications that modern man reacts to other people as to lower animals.  
(one of Bliss's corollaries).

Man is a hunter, as evidenced by cave drawings (2), the habits of savages, civilized hunting, fishing, coursing, animal fights, etc., as well as by man's omnivorous type of dentition and the length of his alimentary canal (which, like that of the omnivorous pig, is intermediate in length between that of carnivores and herbivores of comparable size).

Everyday speech betrays our carnivorous handling of social situations: "I am gunning for you because you have your knife in for me. If you don't get off my back, I'll scalp, throttle, beat you to a pulp, I'll have your blood, you will be shot at dawn, hung, drawn and quartered and boiled in oil. I'll eat you alive without salt, and grind your bones to make my bread". "Baby is so luscious I could eat him". We justify or cry out for ruthless treatment of our enemies or mete it out to them, with the excuse that they have inhuman or subhuman vices - which, however, at other times we call human nature. We know the glib response of the simple murderer who claims he got his gun or poison to kill some vermin. In our dreams, Freud often describes animals as symbols of 'menacing' or competing humans.

We wrench calves away from mothers to feed them skim milk, use every artifice to force lactation, and perhaps wonder that cows are temperamental. We segregate our bitches on heat, castrate, interbred, crossbreed, coddle, and cook for our dumb friends. But the havoc is mild to the anxieties and delusions of calamity we foster in our most helpless and perceptive dependants - our own young - all in the civilized race to escape our own frustrations and anxieties which we still feel from our own childhood. Bliss's simple ideograms and rules of clear thought should help our children to check the same tendencies in themselves as they approach parenthood.

R E F E R E N C E S

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- (4) Ibid. - quoting J. Huxley EVOLUTION, 526, 1942
- (5) Heinz Hartmann, M.D., "Psycho-Analysis and Sociology" - ibid. pp.328-340
- (6) Andrew Peto, in discussion, Introductory Lectures 1952, Psycho-Analytic Institute, Sydney
- (7) Reference not known; but similar findings in cats are reported by Lashley according to P.T.Young MOTIVATION OF BEHAVIOUR, New York 1936 pp.494ff
- (8) Ibid. pp. 103ff
- (9) Editorial, MEDICAL JOURNAL OF AUSTRALIA, 2,8,267-9, 25th August 1951 quoting conclusion of Dr. Bowlby, Director of Child Guidance, Tavistock Clinic, London, in report to WHO on children made homeless by war.
- (10) Johan Ph. van Leent, M.D., (Leyden) former member of Hegelian Society - personal conversation.
- (11) George M. Gould A DICTIONARY OF NEW MEDICAL TERMS, preface quoted in Gould's Medical Dictionary, Blakiston Co. 1943
- (12) p. 37 and (13) General Semantics Bulletin No. 6-7, Lakeville Conn.
- (14) Alfred Korzybski, SCIENCE AND SANITY, Institute of General Semantics, Lakeville