

Psychology, Not Politics, Rules Human Affairs

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We drive ourselves mad for our political convictions. We drive ourselves mad for our political convictions. We dedicate our lives to our politics. We often blur the line between our politics and our religion. We suspect political manipulations are going on all around us. It would seem that human society is a writhing coil of political intrigue. But to believe that is like studying ship building without ever thinking about the sea.

Our political constructions are crude boats put out to ride on the ocean of human psychology. The political world is superficial at best and artificial all the way. In complexity and profundity it is nothing compared to what it aspires to work with, and survive contact with. The ever-evolving ocean, or universe, of psychology is what drives and embodies human life and civilization.

For those who want less melodramatic language, just say politics follows psychology. But this topic deserves dramatic phrasing, or nothing does. Thinking about the mind of mankind in general is the ultimate look at the Big Picture. And it is too much for most of us, or maybe for any of us. How much easier it is to seize onto some political construct, and declare it to be the mainstay of everything.

Would you rather live under the governance of a left-wing sociopath or a right-wing sociopath? Turn the question around: If the mental and emotional condition of your head of state was healthy, humane, and enlightened, would that be as important to you as which political tradition he came from? The point here is not that political theories do not matter. They matter enormously. But they are interpreted by human beings and filtered through human minds, and we cannot lose sight of that, as much as we may want to.

Most people do not want to hear very much about the inexact sciences of psychology. Any probe into the psychological underpinnings of behavior is quickly denounced as “psycho-babble” by somebody. Thinking about psychology might eventually lead around to an examination of one of the chinks in the armor of one’s own personal psychological state, and that is to be avoided above all else. And when we consider the gross anti-intellectualism that permeates seemingly the entire world, and the entrenched stigmas about mental and emotional illness and health, we start to understand why so much attention is focused on superficial matters, and not on the scary, uncertain weather systems of the mind. One’s own mind can be intimidating enough to contemplate, how much more so the combined psyches of humanity in general? Thinking too much about the fact that all people, even retarded people, are made up of billions of neurons and a fantastically complex, holographic, multi-faceted central nervous system, makes it difficult to carry on with convenient attitudes about disposable, “worthless” people.

The public’s attitudes regarding psychology are muddled at best. We understand the great variations in human beings, or we should, and yet we embrace mass therapies of self-help gurus.

The results of this can be catastrophic for many people. It is one thing to espouse a positive general philosophy for the masses, but once you move past a certain point of complexity, one size does not fit all. And some approaches are total quackery, good for nobody.

Companies often do extensive psychological testing before hiring a sales rep or money handler, but senators and presidents get no such examination. If a politician has had psychiatric treatment in the past to put his life in order and become a better person, his career is dead on arrival as soon as that history is uncovered. Conversely, the guy with the head full of snakes can continue on unimpeded by questions of his mental state, right on up until the moment that it is too late. Madness in power is the melodramatic phrase for that situation. As dangerous as we know that can be, how much worse is it when the madness is in we the people, at large, and not just in politicians? The fact that mass therapies do not work does not mean there are not some pathological attitudes that are held on a mass basis.

Humanity's current condition did not emerge in a vacuum. Individuals and societies are the products of their past. The most fundamental traits of people today were passed down from the most ancient of times. Certainly the traumas of brutality and war are passed down across the generations. And the psychological undercurrents of some major political movements in our world today stretch back to the first division of labor in prehistory. Our sexual attitudes were formed in primate societies. Our fear of foreign people comes from the days when hunter-gatherer bands competed for resources, and the tribe on the other side of the hill was considered the source of all hardship.

The study of our psychological heritage is the new science called Evolutionary Psychology. It has only started up in our lifetime, and is still in its formative stages. The essential books in the field so far have been written by Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox. What we may yet discover from this school of thought could change the human race like nothing else ever has. We certainly cannot pretend that we now represent the highest potential of human understanding. The Victorians thought that way about themselves, and not that long ago. How quaint and oddball so many of their notions now seem.

Major evolutionary shifts, epochal political movements, and the psychological trajectory of masses in their billions, these elements of our world are like colossal life forms with their cellular structure being individual human lives. Just like a living cell in your body, the best you can do with your life is to maintain it in good health and be a healthy influence on the lives adjoining yours. The satisfaction that results from that is immense in itself; it cannot be given a dollar value. And it is the essence of mental health.

Topics that are broad to the point of cosmic are not always welcome with some people. The Big Picture should only get just so big. Beyond a certain point it is like looking at the stars, and having someone ask you if it makes you feel small. The best answer to that question is to say, yes it does, but I am only taking responsibility for a very small part of it, and for only a very short time.

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