

EGO-PSYCHOLOGY PAPER

Re-write

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The book that I read was Future Shock by Alvin Toffler. The first two sentences of the introduction summarizes what this book is about:

This book is about what happens to people when they are overwhelmed by change. It is about the ways in which we adapt - or fail to adapt - to the future.¹

Toffler shows how change is forcing man to adapt new ways of living and suggests that we are now living in a time when this change is occurring so fast that man can no longer afford to lag behind. He examines the kinds of change that have occurred in different areas of human endeavor and the ways man is beginning to respond to these changes. He then predicts how man will live in the future based on trends that Toffler sees as precursors to new ways of adapting to change. For instance, there is a chapter in the book entitled "The Fractured Family." In it, Toffler says that the traditional family structure is no longer functional in our society and that as time goes on new institutions will emerge that will assume the functions that the traditional family unit once had but could no longer successfully perform. He suggests that industrialism has led to a streamlining of the family and that super-industrialism, which Toffler sees as the next stage of eco-technological development, will lead to a further streamlining of the family to the point that the traditional family structure will cease to be and new ways of raising children will take its place.

Childless marriage, professional parenthood, post-retirement childrearing, corporate families, communes, geriatric group marriages, homosexual family units, polygamy - these then are a few of the family forms and practices which innovative minorities will experiment with in the decade ahead.²

In relationship to ego-psychology, Toffler's views are interesting. As change occurs at an ever-increasing pace, man's ability to cope comes into question. Exactly how is man coping with change that is apparently rampant? What defense mechanisms are coming into play? Is crisis resolution becoming more difficult and are

individuals becoming incapable of adequately dealing with the objective realities of existence?

We live in a time of confusion, though in the larger scheme of things, this confusion is not without purpose and represents only a transitional stage of social development as we pass from the industrial to super-industrial era. It can be likened to a process of maturation which all of mankind is going through. The old ways of living, along with the values and beliefs and presumptions that they are based upon, no longer are valid as they once were due to changes which are rendering them obsolete. They are no longer as satisfying or as relevant to people as they once were.

The development of alternative lifestyles based on different sets of values may be seen as a way in which man is seeking gratification in a world that is perceived as hostile and no longer comforting. It is the kind of world that man wants to ward off and escape from. It seems that people are less sure of themselves, more anxiety-ridden, and forever groping for satisfaction without ever really experiencing it. It makes people feel angry, and anger can turn into resentment, and resentment can lead to violence. Violence is fundamentally a childish way of resolving anxiety. To Anna Freud, a child's aggressiveness represents the relief of anxiety caused by the repression of the aggressive drive. Aggressiveness can be very satisfying, but the existence of the super-ego causes the ego to seek its repression. When violence erupts, it may be seen as a breakdown of ego functioning and the unleashing of an instinctual drive that is pleasurable yet destructive. Social instability seems to be the norm of the day and it is a reflection of a sickness, a disease, that is permeating our society. What is the nature of this insidious illness? What are its causes? These are questions which may lend themselves to psychoanalytic interpretation.

*A to sociological investigation
ie. Toffler*

Anna Freud presents a theory of ego development based on the view that there are a number of defense mechanisms an individual may resort to in response to anxiety and that the kind of defense mechanism employed depends on the individual - his age, intelligence, and the source of the anxiety. The ego seeks to control the instinctual drive to achieve immediate gratification and does so by employing one or more defense mechanisms as a way of resolving an anxiety-provoking situation, i.e., a situation in which there is a conflict which may lead to neurosis unless there is some kind of resolution. This resolution takes the form of a defense mechanism when the individual is unable or unwilling to cope with the real causes of the conflict. A person may use a defense mechanism as a means of masking his or her own feelings and thereby never coming to grips with the source of the discomfort.

From what Toffler is saying, people are desperately trying to flee from the discomfort and dissatisfaction which they feel in their existence and are erecting barriers against a reality which is becoming increasingly unpleasant to be in contact with. People are reacting to rapid change in different ways. To Toffler, people are suffering from a sickness which he calls "future shock." He describes what the symptoms of this illness are:

These symptoms (of future shock) range all the way from anxiety, hostility to helpful authority, and seemingly senseless violence, to physical illness, depression, and apathy. Its victims often manifest erratic swings in interest and life style, followed by an effort to "crawl into their shells" through social, intellectual, and emotional withdrawal. They feel continually "bugged" or harrassed, and want desperately to reduce the number of decisions they must make.³

"Anxiety," "hostility," "depression," "apathy," "so-

cial, intellectual, and emotional withdrawal," are ways in which the individual may react to change. The ego seeks to maintain psychic equilibrium by warding off impulses which the individual may not be able to resolve.

One response to high speed change is outright denial. People will refuse to make decisions, rationalizing that things are really the same and that evidences of change are merely superficial. The use of denial as a defense mechanism is interesting insofar as denial of reality is one of the motives underlying children's play in general according to Anna Freud. Denial on a large scale may be seen as humanity reverting back to more child-like modes of behavior as a means of preserving some semblance of order in life through simplification and deriving some degree of satisfaction out of life. People are feeling threatened by change and seek flight from the source of the discomfort. Yet flight is impossible and so some people resort to denial as a defense.

A second response to future shock is Specialism in which an individual tries to keep pace with change only in a specific narrow area of life. This way of coping with change may also lead to disaster as one day the person may wake up to find that his area of specialization is now obsolete or so transformed as to render it useless to the person. Specialism may be seen as a form of ego-restriction which Anna Freud considers to be a normal stage in the development of the ego. But when the ego becomes rigid or acquires an intolerance or unpleasure, its development may be impaired. If this is so, then those who seek to maintain order in their lives by existing within a very narrow social framework are at the stage, or have regressed back to the stage, of development corresponding to a time when the ego is weak—the early childhood stage of development. It is a SIGN OF ~~infantile~~ for an adult to narrow his or her life-
IMMATUREITY

tasks to a specific area of life at the exclusion of everything else. Anna Freud says that a child does have instinctual anxiety derived from the threat of punishment. Objective anxiety is the precursor of the super-ego; it is the

anticipation of suffering which
may be inflicted on a child as
punishment by outside agents.⁴

Is this not what people feel when they seek escape from a situation which they find intolerable? Is there not a regression back to an earlier, simpler mode of behavior motivated by a fear of punishment from an outside world which is overwhelming and uncontrollable, a fear which can be likened to that of a child's and which represents a level of immaturity inconsistent with the sophistication that man supposedly has in relating to his environment? Is man's torment any different then that of a child's who is afraid of something and does not have the strength to face it but can only run and hide? Is this the point that man has reached?

A third response to future shock is an obsessive reversion to previously successful adaptative routines that are now irrelevant and inappropriate. Here the individual reacts to change by sticking tenaciously with decisions and habits that are outdated and no longer of any use. Such persons seek to maintain the status-quo as a means of coping with their own insecurity. This also represents a way of running away from the source of discomfort. An obsessive reversion to previously successful adaptative routines is regression, which is another defense employed by the ego as a way of warding off anxiety. Regression is the returning to an earlier stage of development. Anna Freud observed that children used regression quite often, and exhibit it when they are tired or wake up in the morning. Adults use regression when they feel stress. In regressing, people seek to

achieve gratification in a more primitive way. Like the other defenses, regression is a child-like way of coping with reality and obtaining pleasure, or at least avoiding displeasure, from life.

What is wrong with humanity? Are people losing the strength to cope with the pressures of existence? If mankind cannot face up to the changes that are causing emotional distress then there is a question of how well man will be able to survive. By regressing or by denying reality man avoids pain by doing nothing to deal with the causes of his discomfort. In short, man is running away from the problems which he will eventually have to face when it comes to the point that his survival is at stake.

These responses to rapid change are the ego's way of helping a person to cope with an environment that produces anxiety and discomfort. When people feel threatened by reality they erect defenses. This is partly what Anna Freud was saying. Denial and avoidance are ways that the ego takes flight from some dangerous external threat, that is, a situation which generates anxiety. It is the ego's way of preventing neurosis. Unfortunately defense mechanisms, essential as they are for the maintenance of emotional health, can be mal-adaptive, as Toffler points out in his book. Though through denial a person may keep his sanity in a period of rapid change, eventually the time comes when the defense will be inadequate and the person will either have to have enough ego strength to face the reality of the time or retrench into some form of psychopathology.

Erikson's theory of socialization is based on the premise that the personality of the individual develops in the context of the culture. This development occurs through a series of psycho-social crises which correspond with various chronological stages of human life. Society seeks to produce individuals with

personality traits that will enable that society to perpetuate itself.

(1)...the human personality in principle develops according to steps predetermined in the growing person's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius; and (2) that society, in principle, tends to be so constituted as to meet and invite this succession of potentialities for interaction and attempts to safeguard and to encourage the proper rate and the proper sequence of their enfolding. This is the "maintenance of the human world."⁵

Is society producing individuals who will be fit for life in the future? Now is the time for society to work to prevent future shock. Can it be done? Toffler suggests

that the only way to maintain any semblance of equilibrium during the super-industrial revolution will be to meet invention with invention - to design new personal and social change regulators.... The individual needs new principles for pacing and planning his life along with dramatically new kind of education.⁶

In terms of Erik Erikson's theory, it appears that mankind is undergoing an identity crisis corresponding closely with that which occurs during adolescence when the sense of ego identity develops. Clearly, as Toffler points out throughout his book, mankind no longer knows what to expect and feels disorientated and confused. What was once acceptable behavior is no longer acceptable. What was expected once is no longer expected. Everything around us is changing and man is not keeping up with the change.

The integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is, as pointed out, more than the sum of the childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate all identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles.⁷

Erikson goes on to say that the sense of ego identity is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity of the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others, as evidenced in the tangible promise of a "career."

Man is no longer confident that what was expected of him in the past will be expected of him in the future. There is no longer the continuity that gave those living in the past a sense of belonging, of knowing where one's place was and what was expected of him. Social roles are changing as traditional roles become outdated. Confusion is the order of the day. The sense of self that man is seeking cannot be grasped. It has become elusive because man is lagging behind the objective technological changes which are rapidly transforming our society from industrial to super-industrial. The whole world is undergoing one big massive identity crisis. What more is there to say? Toffler shows that it is happening and sees the need for man to learn to pace and plan his life based on a new set of principles. In this way will man be able to regain the sense of identity and reinforce his sense of belonging and purpose. In seeking to resolve this crisis, man may compensate for his lack of direction by turning to totalitarian doctrines or narrowly defined ideologies as a means of attaining a sense of identity by belonging to a "group." Erikson acknowledges this danger and writes of the

deep need of youth to redefine its
identity in an industrialized world.⁸

Conformity is a danger which must be seen as defensive in nature. Erikson says that it is a defense against identity confusion. Well, identity confusion is what all mankind is feeling according to Toffler and this feeling may lead to all kinds of extremist behavior.

Toffler sees future shock as a sickness that an increasingly large number of people are suffering from. The sickness is caused by one's inability to

cope with change which is occurring at an ever-increasing rate. He compares future shock with culture shock in which one feels bewilderment, frustration, and disorientation in dealing with another kind of society. In the case of future shock the same symptoms appear due to the premature arrival of the future.

What the explicit value assumption in Toffler's book is in terms of ego-psychology is that man must have the strength to face up to a reality which is threatening and which has placed man on the defensive. Running away will do no good because it will solve nothing. Hiding behind defenses may provide temporary relief, but it is nothing more than avoiding the problem, looking the other way, making believe that everything is all right. Mankind is faced with a hard decision: come to grips with the problem and re-assert control over his destiny or go along for the ride down the road to oblivion, which is the easier way out as it entails no work and is painless. Instead of being in control of the environment, the environment has overwhelmed man and is now controlling him. Man's sense of self-worth and self-esteem has been undermined. It is time that they be reclaimed. Only by being honest and forthright with himself will man be able to resolve the crises brought about by change. Man must be in a position to determine in what direction he wants society to go. This involves the right to choose one's own destiny. Right now man is in the process of losing that right, and if he does not re-assert himself and regain control over his environment, he will lose this right altogether and no longer be in a position to make any choices. Only when man is fully in control again will he be able to determine his own destiny.

Another value assumption upon which ego-psychology is based is that we are all products of our environment and there is no getting away from it. Anna Freud des-

cribes how the ego develops through infancy, latency and adolescence, and sees it as a product of conflict which ultimately determines what form the ego will take. Now the kinds of conflicts the individual has to face throughout life are defined by the culture in which the individual lives. Erikson is even more of an environmentalist in the way he views human psychological development. In Childhood and Society Erikson shows how two separate Indian cultures produced two different types of individuals, each with personality traits that were adaptable to the Indian culture in which the individual was raised. Erikson also shows how in the case of the Sioux Indians the people continued to cling tenaciously to the old ways though they were no longer living as nomads. By being unwilling or unable to adapt to life on the reservation, the Sioux Indians were slowly destroying themselves. This point is directly relevant to Toffler's book, for Toffler believes that man is planting the seeds of his own destruction if man fails to adapt to a rapidly changing world. What happened to the Sioux Indians may happen to all industrial society!

Philip - This is an
excellent paper. I
am heartened to see
the kind of work
you can do when you try
A+

FOOTNOTES

1. Toffler, Alvin, Future Shock (Bantam Books, New York), 1971, page 1
2. Toffler, page 249
3. Toffler, page 326
4. Freud, Anna, Ego and Its Mechanisms of Defense (New York, International University Press), 1966, page 143
5. Erikson, Erik, Childhood and Society (W.W.Norton & Co., New York), 1963, page 270
6. Toffler, page 373
7. Erikson, page 261
8. Erikson, page 263