

Konrad Lorenz 1975

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In: Evans, R. I. (Ed.) Konrad Lorenz: The man and his ideas. New York:
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 119-128.

[OCR by *Konrad Lorenz Haus Altenberg* – <http://klha.at>]

Page breaks and page numbers correspond to the original paper

Konrad Lorenz Responds to Donald Campbell¹

In his introductory essay (pages 88-118), Donald Campbell has expressed the hope that a discussion of areas of disagreement will add to the validity of his introduction of Lorenz to psychologists. Fortunately this discussion can be carried an important step further. Professor Lorenz responded in a personal letter which he has given us permission to reproduce in this volume.

Altenberg, 16 August, 1974

My Dear Donald,

As I have already said, I feel deeply grateful to you for writing "Reintroducing Konrad Lorenz to Psychology." As I did when I read your rendering of the first papers which you had translated, I felt that you had expressed that which I have been trying to say much more clearly than I ever could have done it. Also, you have beautifully analyzed the slight but important dis-

¹ KL responds to: Donald Campbell 1975. Reintroducing Konrad Lorenz to Psychology. In: Evans, R. I. (Ed.) Konrad Lorenz: The man and his ideas. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 88-118.

crepancy between my opinions and the interpretation given to them by some writers, for instance by Robert Ardrey in his much-too-simple interpretation of human territoriality. You are also exactly right in supposing that the belief in man's "close-to-divine nature may be a packaging of the truth that man is the carrier of a precious socially transmitted cultural civilization." This is exactly why I get furious at anybody who despises religious people or, worse, makes fun of their beliefs.

In relation to your deep understanding of 98 per cent of what I am trying to say, the few points on which I feel that you have misunderstood me hardly seem to count. However, I feel that on most of them a real consensus between us is possible and this feeling impels me to write what now follows:

1. (Page 105) I am certainly *not* "decrying any deviation from a sentimentally idealized version of the past!" I might just as well be decrying the fact that mutations do occur in a species. My point is that the interaction between factors preserving in variance on one side and factors effecting changes on the other side must maintain an equilibrium which corresponds exactly with the inconstancy of the environment in which the living system has to exist, *irrespective of whether this system be a species or a human culture*. I quite realize that the inconstancy of the human environment is rapidly increasing and that, therefore, the influence of rebellious youth must increase correspondingly while conservatism must be decreasing apace, if our culture is to remain viable. In my lecture in Stockholm three years ago, "The Enmity Between Generations," given before an audience consisting predominantly of hippified youngsters, I may have given the impression that I was on the conservative side rather than on theirs. Had I been speaking to an audience of conservative businessmen, I would indubitably have seemed to lean to the other side. I have become reconciled to the fact

that one becomes extremely unpopular with the conservative old as well as with the revolutionary young if one tells them that it is only *together*, in the balance of their antagonism, that they achieve the viability of any cultural system. If you want to have my opinion on the interaction between established civilization and those who feel that it needs to be thoroughly changed, read Theodore Roszak's book *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969)².

2. (Page 107) I do not react antagonistically to the uniform of revolutionary youth — aside from the fact that I strongly dislike uniforms of any kind. If, as an ethologist, I observe my own instinctive antagonistic response elicited by long manes and unwashed bare feet, a response which indeed is analogous to that of the proverbial bull, the result of this self-observation is quite another thing than the instinctive response itself. However, I do not agree with your opinion that this uniform is analogous to the dog collar of clergymen; I think it is comparable to the war paint of Indians. In fact, it was an amusing, if rather humiliating, self-observation that made me realize this. As you say, I myself usually deviate from the orthodox dress of scientists, but I do this for the sake of convenience and not as a signal directed at anybody else. When my young co-workers began to dress in a progressively hippified manner, I caught myself doing the opposite! One day, as I was putting on a collar and tie before going to one of our weekly colloquia in Seewiesen, I fell to puzzling as to why I was doing it. When I realized that I was actually war-painting in protest against the young people, I shamefacedly changed back into my old sloppy clothes. Also, I have to concede that the meaning of clothing has changed even for me: recently, on seeing a short-haired boy dressed nicely in collar and tie, I caught myself getting the impression that he must be rather a sissy. Incidentally, all this has already become obsolete: what was at

² Roszak, T. *The Making of a Counter Culture*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969.

first the "war paint" of rebels has rather deplorably lost its edge by becoming generally accepted fashion.

3. (Page 105) I do indeed regard "industrialized mass production and mass-communication marketing" as a serious danger. Quite some time ago I had realized the deleterious ethical effects which the pseudodemocratic doctrine produces by relieving the human individual of all responsibility for his or her actions. This process abolishes most or all human values, as moral responsibility is not only a liability but a *prerogative of man* not granted to any beast. Slightly later I clearly understood the damage done to human ethics and morals by that which I have termed "technomorphic habits of thought" in "The Fashionable Fallacy of Dispensing with Description." I am rather ashamed that I failed to see the close interdependence of technocracy and pseudodemocracy until, quite lately, I read Theodore Roszak's (1969) great book. If I have always objected to extreme industrialization, it was because I always felt, in a vague and intuitive manner, what it is that Roszak makes so abundantly clear: all these processes are part and parcel of the technocratic trend to make men more malleable, more easy to manipulate, to deprive them more and more of the capacity to make their own decisions, in short, to take away their individuality. I do not agree with your statement that "the modern urban dweller has a much wider choice of styles, and exercises enough choice to end up with a much greater person-to-person heterogeneity, individuality, and freedom than did the archaic villager." I have lived in archaic villages most of the time, but also long enough in great modern cities, and I still disagree. The average city dweller may *seem* to have a lot of free choice, but really he is all too prone to follow the guidance of experts in the high art of manipulating customers. Technocracy is the regime of experts. It is, as Roszak has made very clear to me, a totalitarianism which remains

ideologically invisible because its techniques become progressively more and more subliminal. Technocracy could coerce, but "prefers to charm conformity from us by exploiting our deep-seated commitment to the scientific world view and by manipulating the securities and creature comforts of the industrial affluence which science has given us." Therefore, "it is not easy to question the thoroughly sensible, thoroughly well-intentioned but nevertheless reductive humanism - with which the technocracy surrounds itself, without seeming to speak a dead and obsolete language." Nothing could express my feelings more exactly than do these words from Roszak's book.

All terms connoting *values* belong to this obsolete language. Technomorphic habits of thought have misled the majority of modern humanity into thinking that anything which cannot be defined in scientific language and verified by quantifying methods *does not possess any real existence*. Human freedom, dignity, and morals are regarded as mere illusions and this belief is most welcome to technocracy as, for obvious reasons, all emotions are undesirable from its point of view. The frictionless working of the technocratically organized society is dependent on the predictability of any individual's behavior. Hence the autonomy of the individuum must be abolished. Unpredictable emotions and individual decisions taken under their influence, all individual initiative, etc., constitute a danger to this kind of social system, as Aldous Huxley, that great prophet, has so clearly realized. Anyone really interested in the present predicament of humanity must regard it as a duty to read — or reread — *Brave New World* (1932) and *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) by Aldous Huxley³, as well as Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture*.

There is only one important point on which I find myself strongly disagreeing with Roszak and I am sure

³ Huxley, A. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper, 1932.

Huxley, A. *Brave New World Revisited*. New York: Harper, 1958.

you will find the same: Roszak equates science as such with a purely technomorphic analytical procedure. Although he is fighting on our side, he does not seem to realize that there are cognitive mechanisms other than rational thought and analytical quantifying procedures. Any "scientific world view," as he calls it, would be very unscientific indeed, in your and my opinion! In fact, it would be based on a lousy epistemology, being exactly that kind of pseudoscientific world view against which I have tried to argue in "The Fashionable Fallacy of Dispensing with Description."

4. (Pages 107-113) The slight change of position effected by the influence of Roszak urges me to qualify the statements on pseudodemocratic doctrine which you quote. The doctrine is only an outcome and maybe a tool of technocracy. The real evil, as I see it, is humanity's tendency to evolve culturally and perhaps genetically in the direction of the happy robot, which is best adapted to life in a maximally industrialized social system. Maybe all that I have said there ought not to stand in the chapter on indoctrinability, as Roszak is very probably right in saying that the progress of technocracy is "ideologically invisible," but, if so, this is exactly why it is so dangerous. We do not realize how quickly and easily we can be made into perfect fools by being surrounded by perfectly foolproof machinery, by being guided at every step by comfortably reliable signposts which make the faculty of orientation superfluous, let alone the faculty - of coming to decisions. These then are the evils which you want me to specify. Again, this specification is the danger of "seeming to speak a dead and obsolete language."

You misunderstood me if you think that I am idealizing any past social order. Nothing is less congenial to me than historicism. Evolution and history are one-way processes, there is no static state which can be regarded as ideal. Nor do I see horizontal diversity of cultures as

an ideal state, although it has been, in its time, a factor causing healthy selection. If you ask me what counter-measures I advocate, I am afraid I find myself in the typical position in which the medical man — which I am — so often finds himself: seeing with some clarity the causes of an illness without being able to suggest a remedy. Still you have got something with your suggestion of "horizontal diversification," at least as regards person-to-person relationships. In the natural cooperation of any two friends there regularly develops a division of labor in which, each relying on the particular faculties of the other, the two tend to become more different from each other in a complementary way. Each regards and respects the other as his superior in respect to some special function that has to be performed in the services of their common undertaking. Whether it will ever be possible to produce a viable social system on the basis of this kind of "horizontal diversification," I do not know. In very small groups it does work, as long as none of its members pursues any goal other than that of the common undertaking. It is, then, perfectly feasible to give any co-worker full power to decide, for the whole group, all those matters on which he or she is indeed the greatest authority. In my own department, I am proud to say, this horizontal delegation of authority has always worked to full satisfaction. However, it is quite another question whether it will ever be possible to institutionalize an analogous democratic system by rules and laws without the catalytic function of close personal friendship.

I now come to the most controversial point which you call frustrating, because you rightly feel that in this respect there is not a misunderstanding, but a real difference of our opinions. You do not believe that my alarm cries concerning the dangers of genetic decay have a factual basis. Indeed I do not have any quantifiable verification to offer for their validity. However, con-

sider this: selection is and always has been the main creative and developing agent, from the molecular stage at the very beginnings of life up to the process of gaining knowledge by falsification of hypotheses. The very moment elimination by falsification ceases, the great cognitive process of evolution or of cultural accumulation of tradition, or of scientific gaining of knowledge, not only stops dead, but immediately begins to become regressive. By the very achievements of his mind, man has eliminated all those selecting factors which have *made* that mind. It is only to be expected that humaneness will presently begin to decay, culturally and genetically, and it is not surprising at all that the symptoms of this decay become progressively more apparent on all sides. I may have changed my mind quite a bit concerning the relative importance of cultural and genetical dehumanization; the former proceeds faster by so much that one might regard the second as a rather unimportant *cura posterior*. This change of priority⁷ in my opinion was admittedly caused by Roszak, who has thoroughly frightened me with his convincing exposition of the dehumanizing effects of technocracy. However, the genetic "domestication" of civilized man is, I am convinced, progressing quite rapidly. Some cardinal symptoms which are present in most of our domestic animals are an increase in size and the hypertrophy of eating as well as of sexual activity. That all three of these symptoms have noticeably increased in man during the short span of my own life, is, to say the least, alarming. In my own family and among my friends I hardly know a single case in which the son is smaller than his father. Equally widespread is the quantitative increase of eating and sexual drive, accompanied in both cases by a loss of selectivity in releasing mechanisms. One has only to go to a beach where many urbanized people are bathing to note the rapidly increasing incidence of fat boys and young men

or to look at a great modern illustrated paper in order to be confronted with both symptoms in a thoroughly alarming manner.

Of course I do not know for sure that these symptoms are genetic, they may well be cultural, at least in part, but that does not matter much. Cultural development is analogous to genetical evolution in so many areas that the causal distinctions become immaterial as regards the phenomenon here under discussion, except that cultural processes are not less, but more dangerous because of their incomparably greater speed. Moreover, the medical man is often forced to utter warnings, even if he is not quite sure of the facts. If two people in my home village who have just come back from their vacation in Portugal show symptoms of a light diarrhea, I have to act as if I *knew* they had cholera.

Like Theodore Roszak I am convinced that it is one of technocracy's most insidious stratagems to avoid all coercive methods and to rely on kind-seeming reinforcements alone. You yourself feel that I am being overhard on murderers and criminals in general. I do not advocate the death penalty, nor cruel punitive measures dictated by any idea of retribution or, worse, by any instinctive lust for revenge. A man who is a mass murderer is mentally ill by definition, because a mentally healthy person simply and predictably does not commit mass murder. Nevertheless, I do not think that a healthy philosophy of values can develop without a sense not only of what is good but also of what is evil. It is my chief reproach against the ideology of the pseudo-democratic doctrine that it tends to eradicate, throughout our whole culture, the sense of values on which alone the future of humanity depends. Public opinion ought not to relieve the delinquent of all responsibility by shifting it to the environment that effected his conditioning. It is my considered opinion that murder should be mildly discouraged, not encouraged and even glam-

orized, as it is today. Nobody can be more convinced than I am that the main cause of our present increase of criminality is to be sought in the widespread insufficiency of mother-child contact during early babyhood. However, another, if less important, cause lies in the undiscerning and unlimited permissiveness dictated by the pseudodemocratic doctrine.

I do not believe that the death penalty or incarceration are able to prevent our genetic stock from decay; in fact, there is nothing left in civilized society which could prevent retrograde evolution *except our nonrational sense of values*, which I still believe and hope can take a decisive hand in human evolution, both genetic and cultural. As regards genetics I still believe that the nonrational sense of values plays an important role in normal pair formation, in other words, in falling in love. If I have committed the retrospectively incredible stupidity of trying to tell this to the Nazi authorities — quite in vain, of course — the only way in which I can atone for it consists in pertinaciously preaching the same truth to another world, with which it is even less popular. Donald, there is such a thing as good and evil, there are decent guys and there are scoundrels and the difference between them is indubitably partly genetic. No living system can ever exist without elimination, however humanely it can be brought about and however much one tries not to make it appear as a punitive measure. Donald, even the falsification of a theory is a punitive measure. I know scientists to whom it is more painful than the drawing of a tooth. *We know* that evolution stops on its way upward and steps backward when creative selection ceases to operate. Man has eliminated all selective factors except his own nonrational sense of values. We must learn to rely on that.

Ever yours,

Konrad