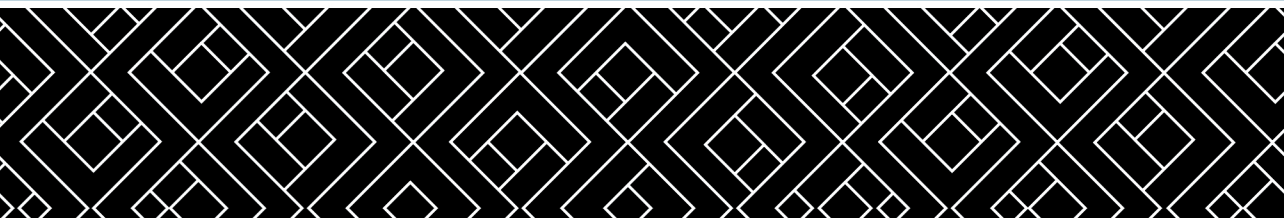


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TOWARDS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

EDITED BY JOHN D SUTHERLAND



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Edited by
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Introduction

JOHN D. SUTHERLAND

That 'mental health' was emerging as a new goal comparable with some of the master-values that have inspired various eras in our history, was suggested by Dicks (1950) twenty years ago. Since then, the subject has become part of our scene with a proliferation of associations and programmes devoted to improving mental health and, above all, with television bringing home to the public the great range of the psychiatric disorders and of the endeavours to treat and prevent them. This greater familiarity, however, is far from the acceptance of mental health as a master-value. On the contrary, there is a persistent and widespread tendency to restrict its import to those matters traditionally the concern of psychiatrists and the caring professions. It is for this reason that many have wished for another term. Yet, in spite of innumerable attempts to find an alternative, 'mental health' has remained, perhaps reflecting an unconscious appreciation that these are the right words in spite of the common narrowing of their meaning – that they do signify a master-value.

The aspirations within the larger concept are plain. Can man, with the knowledge he has gained of how he grows and is maintained as a person in his society, put this knowledge to use so that he may realize more of his potential? Early gains in the first decades of our century raised many false hopes – ludicrous oversimplifications, from the retrospective standpoint of today. Understanding has progressed steadily and perhaps our most valuable advances are in a greater realism about the complexity of man's personal nature. Our increased knowledge is also shedding light on some of the thorniest of the problems in this task, viz, the resistances to the acceptance of man's nature – what Bion (1962) has referred to so arrestingly and yet with such

depressing accuracy as our 'hatred' of learning about ourselves. In this conflict, we have seen, oddly enough, science and religion with all the institutionalization of their stereotypes, as Dicks puts it, united Canute-like against the tide of the facts. But the voice of reason eventually gets its hearing. One of our sharpest theologians, Dr Ian Ramsey, the Bishop of Durham, in a recent lecture (1970) remarked on 'the devastating contrast between an ineffective, harsh theology, a polished cistern which contains no water, no living water, and the knowledge and skills of the Behavioural Sciences which seem to minister so obviously and creatively to the spirit of man'. Almost at the same time, and from the key position in British psychiatry, Sir Denis Hill (1970) has challenged psychiatrists and psychologists on their restrictive views of science and their exclusive concentration on mechanisms underlying behaviour while ignoring the whole phenomena of meaning and its manifestly central role in man's personal behaviour.

If the urgency of our need to know more of ourselves as persons has been denied by our individual and institutional resistances, the technological revolution going on apace is breaking through these barriers in disturbing ways. The current changes in our society are great enough to warrant the sociologists' description of them as a movement into a new 'post-industrial society'. In a penetrating analysis of its implications for the individual, Trist (1968) remarks that the steps we take with regard to the welfare and development of people during the next few decades will be critical. What is most characteristic of the society into which we are now moving is the entirely new degree of interdependence of individuals and organizations. This vastly increased interrelatedness is leading to situations that inevitably challenge existing beliefs and values within the core of the individual and in the institutions that shape him and are in turn shaped by him. For instance, organizational philosophies are shifting the emphasis from competitive relations and separate objectives to collaborative relations with linked objectives. Above all, this new interrelatedness leads to the perception of many social problems, such as poverty and crime, as major integrated problems requiring central planning rather than as an aggregate of separate elements to be tackled piecemeal. Central appraisals lead to 'ecological strategies' in which, for instance, crises are anticipated rather than responded to; measures are comprehensive

with participation and confrontation of conflicts instead of being specific, requiring consent and covering up conflict. These new features forced upon us by the technological revolution demand that the individual move from such values as independence, achievement, and self-control to those of interdependence, self-actualization, and self-expression; from being one who endures a good deal of personal restriction, tension, and stress because of internal and external barriers, to becoming one who has a fuller and freer capacity for enjoyment.

In such a social scene, the relatively static notions of welfare as keeping people up to the standards needed by the industrial economy have to be complemented by the ideal of making personal development as rich as possible. The emphasis on the 'self' in these emergent values is noteworthy. The 'self' is the term we use for that core of the personality that preserves continuity in change and its integrity is what makes change acceptable. If this integrity of the self is threatened, change is resisted – often violently, as befits the defence of our most precious possession.

Several years after Dicks's paper, Marie Jahoda (1958) clarified some of the basic aspects implied by the term 'mental health'. She also brought out the different meanings it could have for different people and in different cultures. Nevertheless, we are on firmer ground than the considerations of cultural relativity might suggest. The new theoretical trends in psychoanalysis that had been initiated by Melanie Klein, and systematically developed by Fairbairn in his 'object relations theory of the personality', were helping to bridge the conceptual gap between what went on in the inner world of the individual and in the culture in which he and his family were embedded. It was the great merit of this approach that it conceived the structuring and functioning of the personality in terms of personal relationship systems. As with so many shifts in theoretical standpoints in the history of science, the new views could be seen as one expression of a fresh *Zeitgeist*. Other psychoanalysts, from their detailed studies of profound disturbances in the capacity for relationships, were independently reaching similar conclusions, e.g. Balint and Winnicott; and there was the exciting support this relationship-systems approach began to receive from the ethological theories of animal behaviour stimulated by the work of Lorenz. These concepts have been

notably applied to the psychoanalytic theory of child development by Bowlby. On the sociological side, the internalization within the person of the relationships he experienced in the family became a feature of the thinking of cultural anthropologists. Cultural patterns were thus seen as interdependent with child-rearing practices, and so cultural values and their influence on the adult could be appraised on a more dynamic basis.

In the work of Parsons, Shils, and their colleagues, the structuring of the personality by the interactions within the family represented a most striking synthesis of the knowledge provided by the psychoanalyst and that from the social scientist about the forces from the social milieu that impinge on the development of the person.

The way in which these independent lines of thought confirmed each other is remarkable – and a reassurance that appropriate theoretical frameworks can be evolved for ordering this most complex area of the individual as a person, with all that this means, in his society. The essence of all this work is the emergence of an adequate model of the development and functioning of the person and of how culture mirrors and is mirrored by the inner world of the individual.

The impetus towards synthesis, springing equally from those psychoanalysts alive to social factors and from those social scientists who accepted the full importance of psychodynamic factors in the individual, has become a creative force in the theory and practice of mental health programmes. Those who share in this trend seek active relationships with sections of the community in which they may occupy a role closely analogous to that of the analyst in his psychotherapeutic relationships. That is to say, the efficacy of the part they play in any change process arises from what they help to release, from the removal of inner blockages to growth, and not from what they impose on the thinking and actions of others. The criticism that such socially active psychiatrists and allied colleagues take on omnipotent powers is for the most part based on fantasies of the same kind that attribute almost unlimited powers of suggestion to the analyst in his psychotherapeutic work. (Most analysts have wished at times that they did have such powers to influence behaviour in the relief of suffering!) The fact is that change processes within community institutions and ways are apt to evoke the same kind of anxiety