

COMMUNIQUE FROM JOHN PRICE AND DAN WILSON AT ODINTUNE IN SUSSEX

Autumnal greetings from the South Downs! Dan is spending a year in Cambridge, England, attached to the Departments of Psychiatry and Anthropology, pursuing his research in the evolutionary epidemiology of psychiatric disorders. On the side, and on behalf of his sponsors, he is bringing his unique views on the American way of life to English Rotary Clubs. While he is spending a weekend at Odintune, we are taking the opportunity to review the current state of evolutionary psychiatry, and we feel motivated to respond to the Editor's proposal for an Institute of Sociophysiological Medicine which has just appeared in the October ASCAP. This appears to us to be a major policy document for evolutionary psychiatry, and we note in passing that it is an expansion of the ideas first expressed in the author's chapter in Michael Chance's Social Fabrics of the Mind. The prospect of a centre, however organised, which might focus on key study areas of evolutionary psychopathology is just what is needed at this stage.

The gist of RG's chapter in Fabrics was the idea that psychopathological states represent exaggerations or distortions of items of normal adaptive behaviour, usually communicative forms of behaviour; and that both normal and equivalent abnormal forms can also be expected to occur in animals. RG identified eight types of behaviour which could underlie forms of psychopathology, and he suggested that these behaviours should be studied, together with their pathological derivations, both in animals and man. This seems to us to underlie his proposal. If we compare the eight "areas of physiological study" in the proposal with the eight "psalics" on page 213 of Fabrics, we find that five are identical, as follows:

1. "Eating and nurturance" are equivalent to the nurturant and nurturant recipient psalics.
2. "Mating and sexual preoccupations" match the sexual psalic.
3. "Powerlessness and yielding" equals the in-group omega psalic.
4. "Xenophobia and in/out groups" is the out-group omega psalic.

New candidates which the proposal suggests for study not mentioned in Fabrics are "Flight, fight and danger"; "Phonology and Communication"; and "Suffering and pain". Psalics in Fabrics which have not made it through to the proposal are Alpha reciprocal and Spacing. We think this represents a constructive development in thinking. We must remember that basic to all these areas of study is the concept of relationships, and also the idea of the life cycle, so that it would not be appropriate to include these as areas of specific study. Four additional areas which we feel should be considered for inclusion are:

1. Territorial behaviour, possibly important for the understanding of agoraphobia.
2. Reciprocity of exchange, suggested by Kalman Glantz and John Pearce as important for the genesis of anger, guilt, depression, etc.
3. Behaviour related to storage and checking, possibly important for the understanding of obsessive/compulsive behaviour.
4. Leaving home behaviour (cf the patrilocality of apes and the matrilocality of monkeys) as possibly important for adolescent behaviour problems.

There are, of course, other possibilities. Sleep, for instance. But one must draw the line somewhere and there are already a number of sleep laboratories.

Overall, we feel that the proposal represents a realistic but ambitious goal, one best achieved by evolution rather than by creation. It is a proposal which might well be attractive to a host institution because it represents a new approach to the study of psychiatric disorders based on no less than a complete paradigm shift. As such, it would offer the possibility of taking that institution into the forefront of twenty-first century psychiatric research. Because of the essentially interdisciplinary nature of the research, it would be important to find a university or research institute in which relevant allied disciplines such as biology, psychology and anthropology were sympathetic to the approach. It is quite possible that a forward-thinking department could foster the emergence of such an institute, in the first instance, simply by drawing together a "critical mass" of evolutionary psychopathologists in a medical center and ensuring they have "protected" research time. The rest might accrue over time with success in interdisciplinary research, grantsmanship and (critically) teaching.

We do not feel competent to comment on the organisational aspects of the proposal, but we remember that in IASCAP we have an expert on organisational matters and we would be very interested to hear Mike Waller's comments on the proposal.

Finally, what about getting eight volunteers to review the present state of knowledge in each of the eight study areas? That would give everybody a good baseline to start from,

and an overview of the whole field. It might make an interesting edited volume. (For instance, we do not know of a comprehensive review of the physiology of "powerlessness and yielding", dealing with the mouse work mentioned by Mark Erickson in the March, 1992 ASCAP; Norbert Sachser's work on guinea pigs; Dietrich von Holst's work on tree shrews; Barry Keverne's work on talapoin monkeys, etc., etc.).

So, dear Editor, from Odintune, our congratulations, blessings and good wishes for your proposal for an Institute of Sociophysiological Medicine.