

**The Vote.
Take Another Look.**

Leo Rangell

The news from neuroscience and psychoanalysis about the election until now has stressed the scientific evidence that emotions play a big part, and that the rational is therefore hardly to be expected. That is true, and we should know this. But that is only part of the story. The discovery of the unconscious, and its exposure to the surface, as well as the confirmation of its role by neuro-imaging, should not result in us overlooking other relevant factors. Conscious life in the decision-making process plays as much of a part as the unconscious, and in fact has the ultimate say. And the unconscious plays other tricks besides leading to the irrational.

A colleague recently wrote me ‘Where is your compromise of integrity? It belongs here. I miss it’. She was right. She was referring to a subject that plays a part at the center of common psychopathology, whose role in mental aberrations has generally been overlooked or not coherently integrated. This is the moral dimension, the question of integrity. While it can hardly be contested that dishonesty has a place in the current psychological disarray, any mention of this is for understandable reasons a no-no and taboo. I would like to describe the story of the role of integrity in the science of character and its place in the dilemmas of the country today.

The sciences of the brain-mind, neurology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and sociology, combine in filling in and fusing the roles of cognition and affects, thinking and feeling, in the total sequence of brain functioning that precedes every final outcome into external action. The act we are all focusing upon as we approach November is that magical vote, the pushing down of the small, metal pencil in private into the hole of our choice. Choice has unconscious roots and a conscious commander-in-chief in each one of us. And our internal apparatuses give us the power to learn, change and develop. Otherwise, if all is already determined, why talk more? But we can, as one or now both of our candidates tell us. And we live in a society that permits it.

In the mélange of outcomes of the decision-making process, reason and emotion, two of the major ingredients of the products that emerge, have been discussed copiously and continuously. I would like to enter and elaborate on that neglected third element-honesty, the question of integrity. I have sort of made this, the moral dimension, an area of special theoretical interest, claiming for it a more overt role in the science of the mind.

It is about 40 years ago that I introduced a new entity, “the syndrome of the compromise of integrity” (C of I for short) into the psychoanalytic literature as on a par with neuroses in human life.

Half a century before, Sigmund Freud had entered the world of depth psychology, discovering the unconscious base of human behavior through his studies of neurosis. His subject was the rampant hysteria of his times, acute and available to him in a peak way in Victorian Vienna at the turn of the 20th century.

In the second half of the next century, there was not necessarily a decline of neurotic behavior but the emergence or at least increased visibility of another type of psychopathology. This was more readily seen in group than in individual psychology, given the non-judgmental requirement of the psychoanalytic process in the treatment of the individual.

I first became aware of this new and pervasive phenomenon in a serious way in the 1950’s, and became riveted to its presence by observing, and being a part of the mass of people glued to their new television sets watching the behavior of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the ultimate investigation to unseat him. I experienced two phases at this American event. One was the long period of public acquiescence, during which the people “bought him”, at least partially. I felt that the group, and each individual, was internally divided, the same way in each person and the group as a whole. They believed him, and they

were uncomfortable with this agreement. As a young psychoanalyst, I felt that what I was learning about the individual could be applied to the mass--and that a certain type of conflict and psychopathology was showing equally in both.

The spell was not broken until a Boston lawyer, Joseph Welch, appeared on the scene and on the television screen, and, defending a junior member of his firm whom the Senator had accused of being part of a Communist front, confronted McCarthy. "Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?" The gallery erupted in applause. The McCarthy days were over.

I don't think this could have happened until the audience was ready for it. The public had moved from one side of the midline of opinion to the other. What they now wanted was provided. The public gets what it wants more than it knows.

Sitting at the table near McCarthy at the hearings as a vigorous ally in his accusations was a young Richard Nixon. Some 20 years later, Nixon was himself being investigated as to his complicity in a crime as President of the United States. Again I was fixated to the proceedings, this time conducting a more formal study. The audience glued to the screen was my extra daily patient each night as the detective story unfolded. "The Mind of Watergate" that resulted was not the analytic study of a man, the President--psychoanalysis of an individual from afar is not a valid or authentic activity--but the analysis of the electorate who elected Nixon President by the second largest landslide in history after his name had been "Tricky Dick" for a quarter-century, 6 months after the break-in, and one month after the Washington Post had announced that those caught and arrested for the act extended into the White House itself. This was data in the public domain, not only permissible but to me pressing to be understood. I was writing about millions of people. I was describing a pattern intrinsic to civilization.

It is the base of the population pyramid, not the leaders, that determines outcome. One conclusion, or speculative explanation of the pathological mass effect, was an unconscious identification with the loosely corrupt. "Who would not like to be able to do the right thing for the wrong reasons, to do the wrong thing and be cheered, to say one thing and do another, to get credit for what others have proven is right and you have always opposed? It is a dream comes true. Henry Steele Commager wrote that giving Nixon a medal for opening up China was like rewarding someone for starting a fire who then called the fire engines to put it out.

The human ego --not as the synonym for arrogance--but the mental agency that directs internal psychic traffic, is pressured on two flanks, one from instincts and the other from conscience. Compromises with the first lead to neuroses, with the second to compromises of integrity. I am not speaking of crime or sociopathy, but to the normal bending of the rules acceptable to everyday life. C of I is to crime as neurosis is to psychosis A borderline patient need not be between neurosis and psychosis but can with equal frequency be between neurosis and C of I.

Although described on the political scene, the syndrome belongs to life in all its aspects. Recent history is non-stop with accounts of its occurrence in politics, business, sports, academia, even science, every human activity in which men jostle with men, whether for financial gains, fame, comfort, reputation, ego satisfactions of any kind. Kenneth Lay, Elliot Spitzer, Jim Bakker, Pete Rose, each name conjures up a peak that toppled in a different field.

In the next decades, American life became the scene of a regular recurrence of public re-plays of these dynamic mental dramas. A succession of sensational events in a continuous series involving ethical breaches tested the tolerance and the morality of the general population. A new type of emotional-ethical-legal-sociologic preoccupation emerged, each instance of which brought complex dilemmas and new criteria to test the judgment of the people and the state of their values. The parade of events transcended politics, news, entertainment, sports; it was a mixture of them all. From excursions into small Wars by a succession of Presidents, into Grenada, Haiti, then the Persian Gulf, all before the present one in Iraq, to the beating of Rodney King followed by the burning of Los Angeles, the Hill-Thomas hearings, the O.J. murder trial, the public's responses to questions of right and wrong, and the need to solve Solomonic

conflicts, were stirred to a point of impotence and incredulity. As the procession of moral challenges rolled on, the public could only sit by transfixed, in a state between arousal and hypnosis.

The 60's had seen the bitterly-divisive, protracted Vietnam War, when the credibility of our Government reached a low point. Ellsberg documented that 4 Presidents in succession over twenty-one years had lied to the American people in their public presentations both as to the motivations for the war and the number of casualties it was costing. From Eisenhower's lies about an American U-2 spy plane over Russia, JFK's problem ending the War, Johnson falsifying a Gulf of Tonkin provocation, to Nixon's and Kissinger's series of broken promises, no American leader came out clean. In the seventies, the famous, and infamous Watergate; in the eighties, the Iran-Contra, with again an equal degree of injury to the trust engendered in the top levels of our Government. The much-admired Ronald Reagan did not escape.

The same dynamic transcended military events. As much was at stake during peace and prosperity. In 1991, the Hill-Thomas "affair" (I say "affair" advisedly) hit the tubes, with again a transfixed audience of 40 million, and a conflict and strain over credulity at high places. Sex, aggression, dominance were in the mix, with race, secrecy and the Supreme Court added--nothing was missing for high drama. Following a prolonged debate, the Senate voted 52 to 48 in favor of confirmation, probably reflecting the same division within the viewing and participating audience.

Four years later, in 1995, the O.J. trial--the new "trial of the century" (forget the Leopold and Loeb trial of the '20's) captivated the viewing audience. 91% of all persons viewing television were glued to the unfolding scene in Los Angeles; 93 million followed the bronco chase. The entire world was aware of the celebrated travesty of justice as experts made a mockery of incontrovertible DNA evidence, and scholarly lawyers interpreted Constitutional law in favor of their celebrity-athletic star-employer-client. Inexorably, Judge Ito ruled in a series that led to an acquittal. Los Angeles was probably spared another riot. I was as little surprised at the outcome as I was about the smoking gun in the 70's.

Comes 2000. And in 2001, 9/11. And the next 3 Presidential elections--until here we are in October, 2008. The same audience. The same electorate. But with growth each year. Things progress. But in which direction and how much?

Scientific advance tells us to take into account at least three streams of determinants crucial to character, cognitively intelligence, emotionally maturity, on the moral scale integrity. Simply put, have we not a right to expect our elected leaders to be smart, rational and honest? Is that too much to ask? Is any one of these traits dispensable in the would-be leader of the free world, potentially responsible for the fate of the planet?

As I prepare for November 8, I muse and reflect, as a psychoanalyst and citizen, that many believe, and I have no reason to think otherwise, that the last two elections were stolen, one in Florida, one in Ohio. That is unacceptable, and perhaps could have been fought against more. In 2000, Gore was too timid about receiving support from President Clinton, whose record as President was very positive. He lost by a 50-50 vote, leaving questions. The Supreme Court ruled for his opponent by a 5-4 decision (one of the 5 was the Justice Thomas of the moral trial of a decade before, appointed by Bush, Sr.). In 2004, it was not nice for the candidate whose war service was limited to the National Guard to make fun and cast aspersions on the other who had performed heroic acts on a Navy boat in combat. I feel sorry that the belittled Kerry did so little to expose and oppose this slanderous attack. It did not reflect well on him as a leader. I would also like to see an appreciation of the difference between an appropriate and even admirable change of mind, and flip-flop as a smear.

As I view the two pairs of present candidates, I feel it is wrong to make a virtue of being close to the bottom of one's class in college, i.e., to be a tough guy and a bad boy, while painting his opponent, who had been Editor of the Law Review at Harvard, an elitist. The irrational ought not to prevail. Smart and good are better.

Is McCain being consistent or even truthful, when he states he would rather lose an election than let his country down, then follows with his choice of Sarah Palin for his running mate? Does he really believe Palin is the best choice for the country? Or did he think that this dramatic pick was best for his election? For the “straight-speaking express”, deviousness and a lack of honesty shine through. Although I assess Obama as the more honest, and also the more capable of the two, I wonder why Obama says so little now about the withdrawal of troops. I know why, and have some sympathy, but I have my preferences. Does he really feel that the troops should be switched to Afghanistan, or is that a compromise rationalization? I am disappointed that Obama does not defend himself with appropriate forcefulness; I would find it refreshing to see a bit of Joseph Welch confronting his opponent again.

The centerpiece, of course, is that we were sent to War on a lie. And thousands have died and are still dying. That outrage in this country needs to be suppressed or muted does not make for a healthy emotional climate. I did not think that Senator Muskie’s weeping when a journalist impugned the character of his wife, Jane, was a sign of weakness. I would like to see more natural human reactions occupy the political and social scene.

Each sees these issues his way. How will the electorate carry out its responsibility? Let the ballot boxes roll. That is the democratic, still the best way.

Thank you and God bless America.

Ha, ha. I didn’t mean that.

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