

## DISCUSSION

## ATTITUDE MEASUREMENT AND "THE DUNLAP DILEMMA"

ON pp. 207-8 of Dunlap's "Civilized Life," occurs the following:

Ask an adult what he would choose if he were offered the alternatives of total annihilation, or of beginning his life over again, living it up to the present moment exactly as he has lived it, to face again the same alternatives. Make it clear that he is not, in his second life, to be allowed to profit by what he has experienced in the first; and the answer almost always is that he would choose annihilation.

The statement has far-reaching implications, and its casual mention among local colleagues elicited questioning reactions; which interested the writer in briefly reviewing the topic, with the sources nearest to hand. Accordingly a form was prepared, designed to represent fairly the conditions recited in the quotation above. After slight verbal changes, its uniform text was as follows:

Name is not needed.....Date.....Group.....  
This inquiry is made to test the validity of a statement occurring in a standard psychological work.

Assume that you are offered your immediate choice of the following:

- .....(A). To be totally annihilated.
- .....(B). To begin your life over again, and live it up to the present moment *exactly as you have lived it, not profiting by any experience of your former life*, and then to be given the same choice of repeating your life, or annihilation.

Put a check mark before whichever alternative you would prefer.

The form was presented in such a way that no one needed to identify the answer, though actually this was often done. Uniformly successful effort was, however, made to obtain record of sex and age to nearest decade. Rationalizations, "unconscious determinants" and various questions of definition are not considered here, the concern being limited to the verbal choice under the assigned conditions. For convenience, choice of annihilation may be termed the "A" response, choice of reliving, the "B" response.

Mainly through the interest of colleagues,<sup>1</sup> whose help is here gratefully acknowledged, were assembled the 121 cases that form the basis of the present note. The material is highly selected; the majority are in the upper 5 per cent., and there is probably no one outside the upper 10 per cent. of measurable "intelligence." Almost all are in the third and fourth decades of life, and they are mainly hospital and university personnel. The data as here gathered show as a whole some one out of six A responses (20 of

121); whereas Dunlap indicates a marked preponderance of A responses. Data from persons over fifty should be of relative interest, but are here nearly absent. Any indications of sex difference should probably be looked on as of culture rather than sex.

The response is a function of the way the person feels adjusted to life as a whole. The largest proportion of A responses, one in three, actually occurs in that one of the groups living under the greatest socio-economic frustration. Another sample, of relatively favored status, yields but one A response in fourteen. The factor of reliability also enters; a cycloid personality would fluctuate in response, a schizoid maintain it. The amount of alcohol in the system, and like factors, should be potent, if temporary determinants. There is some reason to believe that various group pressures inhibit the A response, with its vote of no-confidence in the universe; a reason for "secret-ballot" procedure.

There is a sample of 23 cases, additional to the above, consisting of college undergraduates, not chronologically "adult." Their proportion of A responses is 6 cases. A further sampling, of 32 student nurses, ages ranging from 18 years up, yields four A responses, distributed as to age. In the total material, 176 cases, of whom it is safe to consider all as more than average adult in respect to "intelligence" at least, the A responses total 30. The possible rôles of I.Q., sex, socio-economic milieu, etc., require larger material for their elucidation.

It is a matter of some interest that such an apparently similar formulation of the inquiry should lead to a result so different from Dr. Dunlap's wider experience therewith. The most ardent local pride can scarcely ascribe it essentially to differences between "value of life" or intellectual honesty, in Maryland, and Massachusetts or Rhode Island. Moreover, not all the present samplings, at least, are of local origin. Nor is it likely that appeal can be taken to differences of age or I.Q. If the real cause is an unrecorded difference in mode of questioning (*e.g.*, subtle influence of the opening lines in the form here used) the result is strong support to Dunlap's long-standing insistence on accuracy of procedural detail in experimental psychology. The measuring of "attitudes" is no exception.

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## EARLY GEOGRAPHY IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS

CELEBRATION this year of the centenary of settlement in the Rock River Basin in extreme northern Illinois has brought to the surface memories which, unless recorded, will soon be lost.

<sup>1</sup> Especially Mr. C. R. Atwell, Dr. Leonard Carmichael, Dr. Merrill Moore, Mr. David Shakow.