



The Process Known as Scapegoating

WHAT then are the characteristics of our actual society as we do have it today? Above all I would emphasize the rising tide of anti-intellectualism. This is due, I believe, to the fact that men today (and this means you and me and all of us, whether we dwell this side or that side of the iron or bamboo curtains) are largely dominated by fear. And when men are so dominated, a still additional psychological mechanism comes into play. This is the process known as scapegoating. As to this process, I have not learned much from rats or chimpanzees. The lower animals do not, to my knowledge, go in for scapegoating. But we human beings do (and I may say in passing it is one of our most disgusting and dangerous traits). When we are too afraid or too angry (usually a mixture of both), we want to take it out on somebody else. We want to believe that mother, father, teacher is to blame. In such moments we assert that it is the intellectuals, the scientists, who are doing us in. So we seek to attack and to destroy them. We say let's investigate them. Let's damn them as "eggheads." Let's prevent them from talking and continue in our good, old-fashioned, uninformed, selfish, jingoistic ways. Let us reject these leaders who try to make us think, close our eyes, and forget that we are headed for Armageddon.

What can be done? How can we mere mortals combat this terrible danger, this great divisiveness among us? How can society be made to survive? Perhaps it cannot. But I think it can. For there is one still additional psychological mechanism which will work for us. It has been shown that if a human organism wants some positive goal and wants it passionately enough, then, though fear will get in the way and tend to

narrow his cognitive functionings, will tend to lead him into distorted, narrowed perception and into scapegoating, such fear and scapegoating will not wholly prevail. Even rats will learn (and sometimes faster) how to get to food when there are fearful electric shocks along the way. Hence, if our need as human beings for a liberal society be passionate enough, if our demands for freedom, for fair play, for honesty, for open minds, and for simple human decency really be overwhelming (and basically I believe they are), then whatever our fears and distorting mechanisms, we men will continue to seek the truth. Our liberal schools and colleges will survive, in spite of the recurring attacks upon them. They shall be neither Communized nor Nazified. For I assert that we, the people, all of us, intellectuals, and nonintellectuals alike, still want the truth and nothing but the truth.

For in our hearts the words of the Nazarene still echo: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."—EDWARD C. TOLMAN, "Freedom and the cognitive need," *Am. Psych.* 9, 538 (Sept. 1954), based on an address given by Prof. Tolman at a special convocation, McGill University, 11 June 1954.

This address, of which the present excerpt is the concluding portion, deals mainly with some of the ways in which studies of animal behavior have thrown light on "how real human beings solve real human problems. . . . these facts and relationships about cognitive needs [are seen] more clearly when they have been observed in rats or apes than when they have been merely noted in a common-sense way in human beings."

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