

# Letters

## Psychiatry Overextended

Louis Linn's review (16 Sept., p. 1368) of *Psychiatry and Public Affairs*, a volume produced by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) might lead readers to believe, as apparently Linn does, that it is a scientifically established fact that a "noxious psychosocial setting . . . breeds mental illness." This is certainly not so. I and many others who have reviewed the evidence on this matter regard as merely a hypothesis, and an extremely tenuous hypothesis at that, the notion that psychosocial factors have any causal relationship to mental illness. In the summing up which closes the Milbank Memorial Fund's symposium volume on *The Causes of Mental Disorder* (1961) it is stated:

There seems to be no clearly demonstrated instance of either a cultural or social factor being known to be a predisposing factor in mental illness. . . . The absence of clearcut evidence does not show that the hypothesis is incorrect but only that it has not been demonstrated even once (p. 379).

The enormous discrepancy which exists between the belief in psychogenesis of mental disorder and the actual research evidence is treated briefly in my book *Infantile Autism* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1964, chapter 3), and will be the primary focus of a forthcoming book.

Linn finds "admirable" the GAP psychiatrists' statement that they "favor the application of psychiatric principles to all those problems which have to do with family welfare, child rearing, child and adult education, social and economic factors . . . civil rights and personal liberty." This, they say, "carries psychiatry 'out of the hospitals and clinics and into the community.'" God forbid!

Psychiatry's first responsibility was and is mental illness in individual patients. It is no secret that negative results have issued from virtually all of the multitude of controlled studies which have evaluated psychotherapy (including psychoanalysis). [See, for

example, H. J. Eysenck, *Internat. J. Psychiat.* **1**, 99 (1965); A. Astin, *Amer. Psychol.* **16**, 75 (1961); E. E. Levitt, *Behav. Res. Ther.* **1**, 45 (1963)]. Persons given even intensive and prolonged psychiatric treatment (other than drugs) have not been found to be one whit better off than matched control groups given no treatment, over the same time interval. These negative findings hold for both adults and children, and many doubts have been expressed, both privately and publicly, concerning the ethics of continuing the practice of psychoanalysis and other forms of psychotherapy in view of the dramatically consistent negative findings. In view of the sparse or non-existent evidence for the existence of psychosocially caused mental illness, and the dismal failure of psychotherapy, psychiatry's major weapon against mental disorders supposedly stemming from this source, it seems presumptuous in the extreme for a group of psychiatrists to propose changing society, from child rearing practices through social and economic policies, to accord with their view of how the world should be.

As parents and voters, let them do as they see fit. As supposed experts in human behavior, no thanks!

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## A Lapse of Judgment

Greenberg's illuminating report on the Smale case (News and Comment, 7 Oct., p. 130) could easily have been entitled "The Smale case: an abdication of good judgment." My exasperation after the third reading equalled that after the first. The whole account provides a graphic record of poor judgment on the part of all involved.

Smale seems to be in perpetual revolt against authority. Most of us passed through such a stage, but we managed to leave it behind with our adolescence. At any rate, he has

strong views on Vietnam and Hungary and is not reticent about expounding upon them, which is his right. What is *not* his right is the abandonment of good judgment and taste in the selection of time and place to broadcast his views. He embarrassed his own country which was paying most of the bill for his trip; he embarrassed the host country, the Soviet Union; he created unnecessary problems for the University of California, the National Science Foundation, and his fellow basic researchers dependent upon NSF funds; he handed another issue to the congressional probers; and he made a number of people, myself included, very tired.

The same Constitution that guarantees Smale's rights also delegates the conduct of foreign relations to the President of this country. Surely Smale can expound upon his views within the framework of the Constitution. All that's required is the exercise of good judgment, plus some restraint.

Both the NSF and the University of California showed a complete absence of backbone, it having fled to the same place as their good judgment, presumably. From Greenberg's account, there was no solid reason for holding up Smale's pay, and the two institutions certainly did not improve their respective images by that little gambit.

From newsmen we are accustomed to hearing endless pronouncements about a free and responsible press being one of the cornerstones of democracy. Our press may be free but, judging from the Smale episode, its responsibility is open to question, and the good judgment of the newsmen on the scene seems to have been conspicuous by its absence. We stay-at-homes have a right to expect accurate and balanced reporting from newsmen but, judging from Greenberg's report, we aren't getting it. Are the facts so dangerous and unpalatable that we must be shielded from them?

And now to Congress. Some of our lawmakers seem incapable of understanding that when the right of dissent is guaranteed, some people are going to dissent. It does not follow that dissenters are disloyal. Smale's remarks in Moscow certainly indicate dissent, poor taste, and bad judgment, but not disloyalty. I doubt that his now famous press conference of 26 August gave aid and comfort to anyone, least of all to the Soviet Union.