

Preface

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*"It is the theory that decides
what we can observe."
-Albert Einstein*

Psychohistory is the science of historical motivation — no more, no less. It is my hope that this book will provide the theoretical foundations for the new science of psychohistory.

It is not often recognized that psychohistory is the only new social science to be founded in the twentieth century — sociology, psychology and anthropology all having broken away from philosophy in the nineteenth century.

In beginning any new science, the first task is to formulate bold, clear, testable theories. These new theories must be internally consistent and must be able to generate predictions which can be tested against new empirical material and partially disproved. The testing and partial disproof of theory is the aim of all science, and the only basis for formulating new and hopefully better theory and predictions.

The formulation, testing, disproof and reformulation of psychohistorical theory is therefore my sole purpose in this book.

Each chapter is a new scientific experiment, in which I try to identify with the actors in the historical drama and explore my own unconscious as a way of reaching historical motivations. Only if I can accomplish this inner act of discovery can I move back to new historical material to test the patterns of motivation and group dynamics I think I have found. As Dilthey recognized long ago, this is the only way one can do psychohistory. Ultimately, a psyche can only explore itself to discover the motives of another. The motives of another species, insofar as they are wholly different in kind from ours, are literally unknowable. It is only by discovering the "Hitler in ourselves" that we can understand a Hitler. If one denies one has a "Hitler in ourselves," one cannot do psychohistory. I, like Hitler, have been a beaten, frightened child and a resentful youth. I recognize him in myself, and with some courage can feel in my own guts the terrors he felt that helped produce the European *Gottterdammerung*.

The necessity for plunging into the depths of one's own psyche when doing psychohistorical research often leads critics to confuse introspection with hallucination. Political psychologist Lloyd Etheredge admits he can't figure out whether "deMause's work is either that of a bold, visionary genius-or is wacky enthusiasm for his own excited fantasies." Historian Lawrence Stone wonders on reading my work how "to solve the problem of how to regard so bold, so challenging, so dogmatic, so enthusiastic, so perverse, and yet so heavily documented a model." And David Stannard is afraid introspection is only regression, calling my work "well beyond the fringe of even the most generous definition of scholarship" because, he says, I do my research by spending "hundreds of hours' crawling under the bedclothes with a two-year-old searching for answers to the riddles of history." Introspection is clearly a dangerous task, and those who attempt it in psychohistory are likely to be accused of being the sole source of the fantasies they investigate.

Because introspection is such an important tool in investigating historical motivation the personal life of a psychohistorian must be intimately connected with his or her choice of topic. "Nothing loved or hated, nothing understood" is a truism in the psychological sciences. It should surprise no one that during the decade of my life in which I researched and wrote these chapters I lived through all its topics, writing about the evolution of childhood during my son's childhood, the origins of war during my divorce, and the fetal origins of history during my new wife's pregnancy. I could also trace the influence of my first and second psychoanalysis on these essays, or the development of our Institute for Psychohistory, or of *The Journal of Psychohistory* where these essays were first published. All are relevant to discovery. But ultimately what counts is how well the theory explains the evidence. I methodically study my own dreams to help me understand both my role in psychohistorical groups and my historical material-because history, like dreams, makes perfectly good sense when you know its laws of symbolic transformation. Yet my psychohistorical theories do not derive their truth value from my dreams, but from their power to explain the shared motives of individuals in historical groups.

The "psychogenic theory of history" which I set out in this book is simple to understand, though often difficult to believe. It can be summarized as the theory that history involves the acting-out by adults of group-fantasies which are based on motivations initially produced by the evolution of childhood.

I call this theory "psychogenic" rather than "economic" or "political" because it views man more as *homo relatus* than as *homo economicus* or *homo politicus*-that is, as searching for relation, for love, more than for money or power. The theory states that it is not "economic class" nor "social class" but "psychoclass"-shared childrearing modes-that is the real basis for understanding motivation in history. Thus the unofficial

iii

slogan of our *Journal of Psychohistory*, "no childhood, no psychohistory," however difficult of accomplishment, is meant to keep our psychogenic goal uppermost in our minds as we forge our new science.

As a division of scientific psychology, psychohistory is simply the psychology of the largest groups. It is based on psychoanalysis because this is the most meaningful depth psychology of the twentieth century-as opposed to sociological theory, which is based on eighteenth-century associationism, or its nineteenth-century variant, behaviorism. Yet, as psychohistorian Rudolph Binion constantly stresses, psychohistorical laws are *suigeneris*, not

derivable from clinical practice, but only from historical observation. For while they draw upon sound principles of individual psychology, they go beyond them to dynamics peculiar to large groups, and are no more reducible to clinical psychology than astronomy is to atomic physics. Thus my work envisions a full "history of the psyche," rather than just "using psychology in history." This means that the kind of psychohistory written by those of us associated with The Institute for Psychohistory derives less from William Langer's famous "Next Assignment" for historians to "use psychoanalysis in history" than from Freud's initial hope that "we may expect that one day someone will venture to embark upon a pathology of cultural communities."

The possibility that Freud raises that whole groups can be pathological disturbs historians. British historian E.P. Hennock decries the "crassness and sheer foolishness" of my work on the basis of historical relativism:

That men in other ages might behave quite differently from us yet be no less rational and sane, has been a basic concept amongst historians for a long time now. It does not belong to deMause's mental universe . . . the normal practices of past societies are constantly explained in terms of psychoses.

Although I have actually never applied the word "psychosis" to groups, I know what he means. It is the same historical relativism that Phillipe Aries proposes when he says people in former times who sexually abuse children are normal because "the widespread practice of playing with children's privy parts formed a part of a widespread tradition." This kind of relativism used to be popular with anthropologists in the 1930s—"every culture can only be judged by its own value system"—until World War II came along and it seemed bizarre to say that "Nazis are just reflecting a culture which values burning babies in ovens." There simply is no possibility of eliminating values from psychohistory-loving children is better than beating them in any culture—even though with empathy the psychohistorian can try to eliminate ethnocentrism. Since it is the main thrust of this book that psychological maturity is a historical achievement, every page of what you are about to read is necessarily infused with my value system, and you should be prepared to question my values along with my facts. So, too, of course, with every other historical theory.

iv

The value system of every social science is embedded into its first principles. When sociology began, Comte and Durkheim thought they were only delimiting their subject matter by positing their first principle of "society as prior to the individual." But ever since Popper showed that this was a holistic fallacy which was actually a valuation of the group (I would say "of the group-fantasy") as more important than the individual, sociology has been drifting about without a theoretical base. Indeed, the concept "society" was invented to deny individual motivations in groups; Durkheim was blunt about this flight from psychology, declaring that every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false." I therefore never use the word "society" (adopting instead the non-reified term "group") because I consider it as one more projective device, like "God" or "Witch," for relieving the individual of responsibility. "Society caused X" is always either a tautology or a projection, and it is my conscious intention in this book to provide a

theoretical system based on methodological individualism as an alternative to the holistic sociologies of Durkheim and Marx.

Does this mean that psychohistory reduces all of its subject matter to “psychological motives?” Yes. Only a psyche can have a motive, a group cannot, a factory cannot, a gun cannot. Is psychohistory, then, “history reduced to merely personal motives?” Yes again. All motives are personal, though the “merely” is a denial of their importance. And the charge of “reductionism,” often leveled against psychohistory, is simply misplaced, since it is not a failing but a scientific goal to reduce seemingly complex and disparate processes to simpler and more basic forces and principles. All other sciences long ago learned that the universe of available “facts” is near infinite; only historians still believe they can learn something just by continuing to pile up more and more narrative “facts.”

Historians are trained in the theory of the uniqueness of every historical event. Most narrative historians are as convinced of this principle in human history as medieval men were of it in natural history. At best, contemporary historians will often narrate some political events and then some economic events and thereby assume by mere conjunction that the two narrations make a theory. But narrative history is not a science, nor is it meant to be. Narrative history describes sequences of historical events; psychohistory discovers laws of historical motivations. Narrative history is full of “accidents” and “mistakes”; psychohistory is only concerned with lawfulness, especially of “accidents” and “mistakes.” Narrative is period-centered, and all historians are expected to specialize in some country and period; psychohistory is comparative, and can no more specialize in one area of history than an astronomer can specialize in one area of the sky. When students hear me jump back and forth among periods in lectures they often complain that “you don’t really seem to be doing history.” They are right.

v

But what a difference this new scientific model makes to one’s view of history! What you will read in this book will turn upside down almost every notion of how to view history which you have learned elsewhere. Rather than history being how public events affect private lives, you will see history more as how private fantasies are acted out on the public stage. Rather than being mainly about adult men’s activities, you will see how history is first determined in families by women and children, as well as men, and only later on reflected in adult public activities. Rather than how a few leaders maintain power over masses of individuals, you will examine how groups delegate tasks to leaders, so that “power” becomes mainly a problem of group masochism instead of one of force. Rather than wars being terrible “mistakes,” you will discover them to be wishes. Rather than our progress beyond magic and superstition being due to the accumulation of knowledge you will see it as an improvement in maturity, due to the evolution of childhood. Rather than traditional man as secure and modern man as alienated, you will see why traditional man is far more likely to be schizoid and modern man to be happy and integrated. Rather than the traditional family as a strong but now-decaying institution, you will witness the growth of the family, with its love of children and spouse, as a modern achievement, growing stronger all the time. Rather than civilization being the ever-greater renunciation of instinctual pleasure, you will come to view it as the ever-greater satisfaction of needs. And rather than history as a victory for Morality, for the superego, you will discover why it is actually a victory of Desire and Reason, of the id and ego, over the superego.

If this appears to make me an optimist, I would not want to mislead you. Evolutionists are not always optimists. Since I try not to idealize history, I lack the first qualification for being an optimist. And since the Whig interpretation of history is based on the notion of inevitable progress as the result of the accumulation of knowledge, my theory cannot be Whiggish. What I do believe is that whatever maturity we have gained through the slow evolution of childhood is now being threatened by our technological capacity for self-destruction, a capacity which now amounts to fifteen thousand tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth. If we do not understand how we have brought this all about and why we still need periodic sacrificial purges, we will surely soon act out our infantile group-fantasies of total world destruction.

If this book can be a contribution to this understanding, I will consider it a success.
