

THE MENTAL ENVIRONMENT

Also by Bob Gebelein:

*RE-EDUCATING MYSELF: An Introduction
to a New Civilization (1985)*

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THE MENTAL ENVIRONMENT

(Mostly about Mind Pollution)

Bob Gebelein

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

1. THE MENTAL ENVIRONMENT

Clean air. Clean water. Clear head.

We exist within a physical environment, and also within a mental environment. Except for the most solitary among us, we are immersed in a sea of other people's thoughts, ideas, theories, perceptions, worldviews, information, misinformation, hypnotic suggestions, fiction, prejudices, judgments, manipulations, ridicule, and horror movies. Some of this mental input may be beneficial, as when a child is taught reading, writing, arithmetic, basic skills, and accurate knowledge. But in with that basic knowledge are already cultural prejudices, fiction, manipulations, and judgments that may not be accurate.

Like the physical environment, the mental environment has also been polluted. When we talk about "the environment," we are usually talking about destruction and pollution. We didn't talk much about "the environment" until pollution became an issue. And so when I talk about "the mental environment," I am mostly talking about mind pollution.

Why don't I just call this book "Mind Pollution," then? Because I want to talk about other things than pollution, although right now pollution seems to be the main issue, blocking the way to mental and spiritual growth. Yes, there are uplifting elements leading us to knowledge and spiritual enlightenment if we are astute enough to

find them, but these avenues of human advancement have been so corrupted and polluted that it is more likely we will be led in the opposite direction in the name of knowledge or spiritual enlightenment. The words “truth” and “love” have been totally exploited by those who seek power over us. Just as we need to clean the sewage and trash and rubber tires out of our rivers before they can run clean again, so we need to clear the pollution out of our heads before we can be expected to think clearly again, and make real progress towards knowledge and spiritual enlightenment.

And what is “mind pollution?” Mind pollution is any thought, idea, fiction, hypnotic suggestion, judgment, etc. — any mental input — that makes one’s view of reality less accurate. “Accuracy” is the subject I am dealing with here — how to make one’s worldview as accurate as possible and free of the polluting elements in the mental environment — or, to start with, just to recognize those polluting elements.

I am using the word “accuracy” instead of “truth,” for three reasons: First of all, “truth” is many times confused with absolute or ultimate truth, and I am not claiming to know the absolute or ultimate truth. Second, the word “truth” has many times been exploited to represent lies. “Pravda” means “Truth.” Third, the word “truth” has been massacred in post-drug-movement America, as in “your truth” and “my truth,” meaning one’s perception of the reality instead of the quality of accuracy of that perception of the reality.

I get around all that with the word “accuracy.” Accuracy is a quality, not an absolute state of being. There are degrees of accuracy, as for example accuracy to a certain number of decimal places. I don’t have to argue with the philosophers that a viewpoint is absolutely accurate, but only that one viewpoint is more accurate or less accurate than another. And best of all, the word “accuracy” has not yet been corrupted by the mind-polluters.

This is not the definitive work on the mental environment, but only what I happen to know about it. I just want to introduce you to the fact that there is a mental environment and pollution of that environment, and describe some of the means of pollution that I am aware of — just to let you know that the subject exists, so that you can be thinking about it.

I am not writing so much about the obvious and deliberate inaccuracies created by advertising, the media, and political propaganda. These inaccuracies are external to most people. Democrats don't believe Republicans' propaganda, and Republicans don't believe Democrats' propaganda. They already have internal belief systems that cause them to accept some propaganda and reject other propaganda. I am writing about inaccuracies in these internal belief systems, especially in some of our most fundamental belief systems — the religious, the academic, and the New Age — and the social forces that create these inaccuracies.

The main source of mind pollution is social manipulation. If you belong to our tribe, you have to believe as we believe, and think as we think, not because it is accurate, but because we will ridicule you, ostracize you, and kill you if you don't. If you belong to our religion, you have to believe as we believe, not because it is accurate, but because we will despise you, shun you, and threaten you with the fires of Hell if you don't.

Ah, but we are more advanced than that today. We live in a free country. We have legal laws that guarantee us certain freedoms to think and believe and speak and act without government persecution. Actually no government, unless clairvoyant, can restrict one's freedom to think or believe as one wants. But our government also gives us the right to express our thoughts and beliefs, and act on them, within certain limits.

But in spite of all these legal guarantees of freedom, we don't really live in a free country. We have a whole other set of laws, the social laws, that govern our behavior within social groups. These laws are unwritten and often unspoken. If you belong to any social group, you must behave according to its norms and express opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that agree with those of the group, and also share their prejudices against members of other social groups.

These social laws are enforced by what are called "normative" pressures — that is, pressures to conform to group norms. These normative pressures have nothing to do with accuracy. They are only forces.

Would you rather believe that the sun travels around the earth, or be burned at the stake? We don't do that any more, but the modern

equivalent is just as effective. If you are an academic person and you choose to believe in aliens, for example, you may quickly learn that academic freedom does not exist, as you are first cautioned by your comrades, then ridiculed, then scorned, as you lose first your status and then your job, and then your nice house, and you are forced to live in a trailer, and your children are ridiculed at school, and so on.

The enforcement of social laws, like the social laws themselves, isn't always articulated, or even thought. People will give you "looks." They will think of you as "one of those." They will pass you over for promotion or tenure because ... well, "It goes without saying."

Do you want to feel good, or do you want your thinking to be accurate? If somebody tells you you are the greatest person in the world, it certainly makes you feel good, but it has only about one chance in six billion of being accurate.

And so, if you conform to the norms of the social group, people will make you feel good by telling you you are the greatest, and if you deviate, they will make you feel bad by telling you you are "weird" and "strange" and ridiculing you and withdrawing love and hating you. None of this has anything to do with the accuracy of their belief system. It is purely emotional. And we know, thanks to Freud, that the emotions are far more powerful than the intellect. The emotions are the "motive" force, and they can force the intellect to rationalize whatever they want it to believe.

Is everybody "brainwashed" by their social group? To some degree, yes. People who have studied the brainwashing done by the Chinese Communists to American prisoners of war in the Korean War have noted that there are certain similarities to the normal socialization process of growing up in California or Kansas (Winn, 1983, page 5). Maybe the normal process isn't as harsh, but the same elements are present: pleasure and giving of love for conformity, and pain and withdrawal of love for deviance or non-compliance. And anybody who has ever been in the eighth grade knows that that process includes torture.

So why not just go along with your social group and feel good? First of all, the things they are pressuring you into believing may not be accurate, if that bothers you. Second, they may march you off to

war, or mass suicide, or to some place that will ultimately make you feel not good. But worst of all, you might wake up some morning and find that you don't have a self, and that really is the loneliest feeling of all. And conversely, the people who have studied brainwashing report that those with a well-developed self are the most resistant to brainwashing.

We live in a free country, but you can't just be what you want to be or think what you want to think, even on the most personal level. Ultimately we all have to face the peer-group pressures — the tyranny of those people we think of as our “friends.” You have to get permission from your social group to read this book, and if you don't, you will have to lie to them about it.

