

BRAINWASHING

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ABSTRACT

In this article an attempt has been made to present a brief analysis of the process of brainwashing. The mechanism, the techniques employed and a brief history of brainwashing has been traced. It has been suggested that in order to resist this powerful weapon, we must understand the poison and find its antidote.

INTRODUCTION

The recent treacherous attack by the Chinese and the subsequent attempt at indoctrination of the Indian p.o.w's in Chinese custody have aroused considerable interest in the subject of brainwashing. "Brainwashing" was first used by an American journalist Edward Hunter¹ as a translation of the colloquialism *hsi noo* (literally, "washbrain"). Originally used to describe Chinese indoctrination techniques, it was quickly applied to Russian and Eastern European approaches at remoulding the life of their countrymen, and then to just about anything which the Communists did anywhere, as illustrated by the statement of a prominent American lady—who, upon returning from a trip to Moscow claimed that the Russians were "brainwashing" prospective mothers in order to prepare them for natural child birth.

The official Chinese Communist programme of *Szu-hsaing Kaitsuo* (translated as "ideological remoulding", "ideological reform", or "thought reform",) has in fact emerged as one of the most powerful efforts at human manipulation ever undertaken. To quote Tibor Mende²: "Those blue men and women all through the year.....are the tiny vehicles on which the Supreme Will travels down the slopes of the administrative pyramid to the hundreds of thousands of villages forming its base".

SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF BRAINWASHING

Scientific interest in the subject of brainwashing was aroused at the time of the Korean War. An analysis of the methods and techniques employed by the Chinese as revealed by the prisoners of war in their subsequent interviews who opted to go back to their own countries led to the conclusion that the basis of the process of brainwashing was the researches on the conditioned reflex of the great Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov³ on dogs.

We have all seen saliva drip from a dog's mouth as he waits in eager anticipation for his food. Originally, i.e. in young animals or very young children, saliva does not flow until food is actually into the mouth: it is an automatic and reflexive glandular reaction, the adequate stimulus for which is food-in-the-mouth. In time however, the sight or odour of food alone is able to initiate the saliva flow. Such a response, brought about by something other than its original and biologically adequate, stimulus is a "conditioned reflex". The associated stimulus—the sight or odour of food—is called the 'Conditioned Stimulus.' Later work shows that many responses other than simple reflexes can be conditioned. This fact is the main stay of the mechanism of brainwashing. The light had replaced the food in the mind of the dog, the way a slogan or label can replace a thought in a man's mind. Condi-

tioned reflex action can be brought about deliberately by outside influences or induced by man. A new attitude is created by repetition of the conditioned reflex.

Just as repetition of the pairing of the conditioned stimulus and the unconditioned stimulus strengthens the connection, presentation of the conditioned stimulus without its being followed by the un-conditioned stimulus results in a progressive diminution of the response. A response that has been "extinguished" may recur later, a phenomenon called "Spontaneous recovery". The procedure of presenting conditioned stimulus regularly without reinforcement (food) was called by Pavlov "experimental extinction".

What happens when the dog loses its ability to discriminate is shown most strikingly in cases of "experimental neurosis", produced by Pavlov and his associates. According to Pavlov⁴, it is due to too great strain being placed upon the "inhibitory brake". When finally the brake gives way, response becomes general and riotous. Apparently, the essential element in such behaviour when produced by the conditioned reflex method is the clash between mutually incompatible responses. Faced by a dilemma the animal either reacts violently and without discrimination or refuses to act at all. Brainwashing also makes a neurotic of a normal personality.

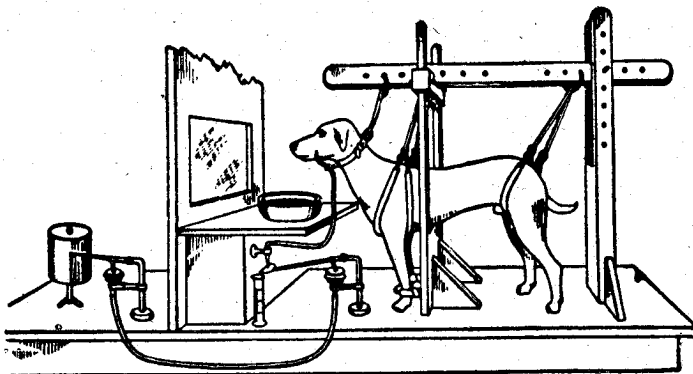


Fig. 1. Illustrates Pavlov's method of establishing a Conditioned Salivary Reflex

TECHNIQUES AND MECHANISM

Brainwashing has become an important and devastating tool both in war and peace like any other nuclear device. Normal people would refuse to believe that such barbarities which send shivers down one's spine could exist in our times. Brainwashing is a political strategy for expansion and control. It is made up of two processes. First, conditioning or softening up process which is primarily for control and propaganda purposes. Second, indoctrination or persuasion process for conversion purposes. Both can be administered simultaneously, or either of them can precede the other according to the objective in view.

The general aim is to create a mechanism in flesh and blood, with new beliefs and new thought processes inserted into a captive body. The short term objective is mainly for propaganda purposes while the long term view aims at winning converts who can be relied upon to act as desired.

Brainwashing is a subtle and intricate mechanism. Each of the two processes employs a number of techniques varying in degree according to the patient's resistance and purpose of brainwashing. The techniques range from tender love and sweet reasonableness to the

barbarous physical and mental tortures of Chengiz Khan. One recoils in horror in listing the blood curdling techniques, viz, food deprivation, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, prolonged fatigue, sub-zero bath houses, mental and physical threats, "suggestive interrogation", deliberate incorporation of confusion in mind, devilish arguments which chisel away at one's memory, destroying hope, standing on ice without shoes, made to stand attention for hours, holding up a heavy object until totally exhausted, tie a man up and let him swing from a rope and beat him with rods, stick him into a hole in the ground, long marches, icy-shower, etc.

Psychiatrists, doctors and dieticians are members of the brainwashing boards. Drugs and hypnotism wait for the strong willed who might escape into death from the bestial treatment. The Chinese call the drug injections as "true word serum". Drugs help in the softening up process and in hypnotizing the person who offers resistance. The post hypnotic trance is extensively used by the Chinese on an individual and mass hypnotic basis.

"Learning" and "confession" are the two inseparable broadways in which the above techniques are applied. In China, "Learning" starts with the study of Lenin-Marxist literature and develops into the critical faculties, thought conclusions, "learning by doing" and "confession" of wrong doings to the party. As Hunter¹ remarks, "fake evangelism and quake psychiatry in a setting of science" are the sources from which methods to make "learning" and "confession" acceptable and practical have been derived.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

The whole operation of brainwashing aims at depriving the individual of clarity of thought and upsetting his sense of values. The common tactic is to provide just enough scientifically unbalanced food for meagre survival but not enough for a person's brain to function adequately. Prolonged fatigue along with food deprivation cracks the strongest mind and drives the healthiest individual insane. At this juncture he may accept any frame of reference without the intervention of critical thought processes.

A normal day's routine brainwashing programme on top of hunger and fatigue can be summarized as:—

1. Wake up and "Suggestible interrogation" starts in the brainwashing chamber which may end only at night without food.
2. If in the "learning" class during the day it is discovered that he likes a particular game, he is allowed to play the favourite game till completely exhausted.
3. When thoroughly fatigued, make him attend the night "democratic discussion" meeting for hours together.
4. Now let him do his day's study of the literature distributed in the class and write his confessions, reports and other assigned task.
5. Then at any odd hour of the night, wake him up to ask: What he is thinking about then?

The place of sleep may be an icy bath-house or hole dug in the ground. Long marches are common where death lives among men. Then fog settles over the mind.

The element of stress is produced by bringing in uncertainty. The patient is bewildered what is expected of him. A warm sweet smile may be followed immediately by a thrust of the pistol in your face. You may be lined to be shot at and suddenly you find yourself shaking hands with the brainwasher who immediately earns your gratitude, love, and affection. He has duped you to extract some secret. He may make you hear the screams

of your companions to put you in terror. You may be put in a closed tub with the level of water rising slowly. It might touch your nose, ankles only and may submerge you.

Such threats combined with the most savage tortures, atrocities, and violence are part of the game of brainwashing. "Scientific" tortures and violence make him mad. The "tiger's chair" and "diamond-mine treatment" and numerous modifications of the ice-bath-house constitute the repertoire of the brainwasher in China. In the "tiger's chair" a man is tied with face upwards to a long wooden plank. Rough stones or rocks are put under his legs, more and more fit in when his knees strain against the tight knots and the joints give way. In the "diamond-mine treatment", the patient is made to crawl back and forth on a plank strewn with broken glass. Other times, he is pulled up and ice-bath chambers were common for the Korean P.O.W's. The Indian P.O.W's. were also given the same treatment. The frost bite, the freezing of the body giving rise to rotting up of the skin and bones, and ultimately developing into gangrene, will not prevent the brainwasher from interrogating you. All these horrors send a shreak down one's spine.

CONCLUSIONS

Brainwashing uses methods found in mental therapy. In psychotherapy, the therapist in his clinical sessions by the free association technique tries to explain the sources of the patient's maladjustment to the problems of life with a view to give him insight into them and ultimately cure him and rid him of his symptoms. In "corticovisceral Psychiatry" as the Americans call brainwashing, the brainwasher tries the same process and techniques in the reverse direction in order to produce neurosis and get confessions.

The natural question arises: What to do about this mental attack when we are very much confronted with it? The only answer is that one must know the poison before one can find an antidote. For, to be successful, brainwashing depends basically on the subject's ignorance of it. The struggle for the ultimate survival of our mind requires that we must know the whole mechanism of brainwashing. In addition we must get some kind of mental training from the early childhood to strengthen faith and conviction in our ideals and values of life with the utmost clarity of mind and thought. This is the only mental vaccination against the on-slaught of perverted Pavlovian technique.

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