



Gen. Buck Turgidson, in Kubric's *Dr. Strangelove*

Why Do We Judge Normal According to Behavior, But Sanity According to Thoughts?

To create a sane society, take emotions seriously.

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“Whenever stress rises, the human brain switches to autopilot and has an inherent tendency to do more of the same, only harder. Which, more often than not, is precisely the wrong approach in today's world.”

— **Robert K. Cooper**, neuroscientist, leadership advisor

World Leaders

I suspect Vladimir Putin is insane, and I think the same of Stalin. Gorbachev opened the USSR and loosened Russia's tyrant grip on its slave states. For this, he's considered a pariah at home and seen with disinterest abroad.

Joseph McCarthy was then, and Donald Trump is now psychopathic. Let's not mince words. To be fair and in the spirit of the day, race, religion, gender, and creed play no role. Psychopaths seem to be coming out of the woodwork.

These world leaders had no trouble appearing normal and being seen as normal. If you look human, dress in a suit, shake hands, make small talk, and smile, people think you're normal. So it is today: everyone is surprised that gunmen can be children and school shooters are regular people. At least they behaved regular, up to that point.

General Curtis LeMay

I'm reminded of George C. Scott, whose portrayal of General Buck Turgidson was based on the real-life, WWII, Air Force General Curtis LeMay (History on the Net, 2019). General LeMay is credited with killing a half-million Japanese civilians even before the atom bombs were dropped. LeMay had his finger on the nuclear weapons button, and he pressed it, but no one called LeMay emotionally unbalanced.

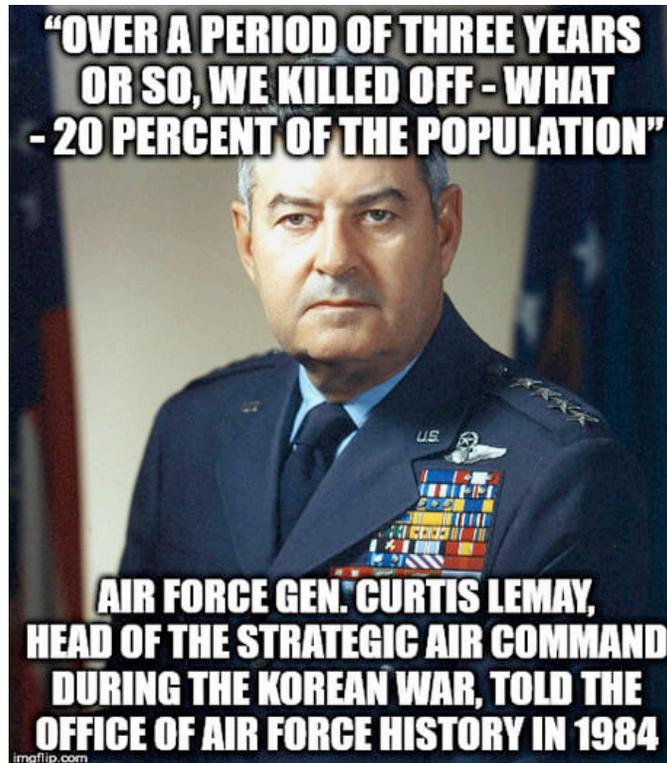
"I can't get over the notion that when you stand up and act like a man, you win respect... though perhaps it is only a fearful respect which leads eventually to compliance with your wishes. It's when you fall back, shaking with apprehension, that you're apt to get into trouble."

— **Gen. Curtis LeMay**, quoted in *Curtis LeMay: Strategist and Tactician* (Kozak, 2014)

But then, perhaps I'm being unfair, as almost everyone excuses murder as sane when in war.

"Sir, I'm not saying we won't get our hair mussed, but [we'd lose] no more than 10–20 million killed tops. . . Uh, depending on the breaks."

— **General Buck Turgidson**, in Stanley Kubrick's film, *Dr. Strangelove*



The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental illness, the DSM, identifies illnesses according to a person's behavior and then ascribes it to their state of mind. Society doesn't care what twisted things you think until you do something twisted. Many or most of the DSM diagnoses are based on behaviors. When you act normal, you are normal!

"In DSM-IV, each of the mental disorders is conceptualized as a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom." (Stein, et al., 2010).

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Who Are the Institutions?

When a person delegates their actions, we rarely hold them accountable. We accept the insane as sane because they refrain from doing the crazy things they think. To make deniability more effective, we create hierarchies that protect those higher in the organization. When in a position of power, psychopaths get someone else to do their bidding. If they didn't, they'd really be crazy!

Organizations are getting increasingly irresponsible:

"Professionals claim to contribute to social well-being, put their clients' needs ahead of their own, and hold themselves accountable to standards of competence and morality. But both popular and scholarly critics accuse the professions of serving themselves at the expense of their clients, ignoring their obligations to public service, and failing to police themselves effectively."— **Donald A. Schön** (1984)

Dr. Strangelove was released in 1964 and Donald Schön, a management consultant and academic at MIT, wrote the above quote twenty years later. Few took either of them seriously. Now we're starting to wake up to the general psychopathology of Western culture, but we're still not calling a spade a spade because we're not asking what's really on people's minds. As a culture, we're still making excuses.

My point is this: if you accept deranged people as normal until they act deranged, then you're deranged too. Maybe you're not as deranged as they are, but you lack discernment, discretion, insight, and boundaries.

You lack boundaries because you believe that thoughts that are not manifest are safely contained. You believe repression is a successful strategy for maintaining mental health, and you probably apply this to yourself.

I can be accusative in this way because I know this is how we are trained to think. I live in this culture too. And while I'm pretty un-WOKE, one claim of Critical Race Theory that I agree with is that we deny what we repress.

Racism is one of these things, but more pertinent to our mental health are all the violent, angry, frightened, depressed, bitter, and heartbroken emotions we repress. We are the institutions that we tolerate.



Red Flag Laws

As we know from stories of stalkers and hate mongers, you can't put people away unless they do something. We recognize the justice in that, but we don't recognize the opportunity that's bred by this kind of indifference. Most violent crime is impulsive, but it doesn't come from

nowhere. It represents actions that have been on people's minds for a while.

Twenty US states have Red Flag laws. These are laws that authorize police or family members to petition state courts to temporarily remove firearms from a person deemed to be a danger to themselves or others. In this case, "danger" is partly defined by words and thoughts and not only by threatening actions. The National Rifle Association has derided these laws, saying they have not stopped gun violence. But you can't use lack of evidence as evidence of lack: how can you know which violent actions did not happen?

We have protection and restraining orders, legal orders issued by a judge based on acts or threats of injury. They're usually issued in cases of family violence. Family violence is one area in which we recognize emotion as primary and appearances as secondary. We need to do this more generally. We need to address our emotions.

You can't train people to kill people, call them heroes, and then expect them fit in to society. When you're trained to act, your emotions are changed and your personality follows suit. It is a fraud to diagnose as an illness something we intentionally create. PTSD in the military is a condition society creates and then makes excuses for.

Recall that psychiatry exists as a field because our society wanted to make murder acceptable in some circumstances. Freudian analysts were brought to the US at the turn of the 20th century by the military to "remedy" battlefield PTSD. To rebuild soldiers who slaughtered and endured slaughter so that they could return to slaughter-ability, or become productive workers. It makes me upset that many of my psychotherapy colleagues treat PTSD in veterans without questioning how or why it was caused in the first place.

Depression

How much of our depression do we create ourselves? Who is creating it, and why? At some point, all of my therapy clients question their life's purpose. It's something we all need to consider, and the sooner, the better.

When I was climbing unroped and alone up thousand-foot cliffs, I really didn't have much of a life purpose. I was looking for something to live for and, whether you can understand it or not, I seemed to find it by looking down the barrel of my mortality.

People who are depressed don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. They are people who have followed a program that's created a purposeless life. We call this "a disease." We treat it with pharmaceuticals, and many clients believe this helps them.

One thing that hypnotherapy teaches you is that you can believe anything you want. We say, "There's a deficiency of the GABA-2 enzyme that inhibits the action of the serotonin receptors," or some such horseshit. It's horseshit because there is always some mechanical thing going on, even if we don't know what it is, but it's not the cause, it's just part of the process.

The cause of depression is what creates the circumstances for it. Once the circumstances are created, the mind and body adapt. But just as ice cream doesn't cause drowning—but ice cream weather does lead to more swimming—serotonin receptors don't cause depression.

We might claim depression is an exception to my rule. We might claim that we recognize depression when a person expresses depressed thoughts, and we don't wait for them to act, but do we? I don't think so. Just like all the other "illnesses," if you don't act depressed, you're considered normal. You might seek help, but as long as you're fulfilling your obligations, family or otherwise, no one will complain. And they won't give you much support, either.



Violence

I recently read a piece in *Physics Today* magazine (Dahn, 2023). It was an article about

Pascual Jordan, a German physicist and virulent member of Hitler's Nazi party. He had an extensive, collegial relationship with my mentor Eugene Wigner and his close friend John von Neumann. Pascual Jordan didn't attack John or Eugene, but he railed against the Jews. John and Eugene, both Jews, fled Europe ahead of Jordan and his anti-Semitic tide. Eugene said, "The threat of murder has a galvanizing effect."

Eugene was a wise man, and his friend John was a human supercomputer. Yet neither of them were estranged by Jordan's thoughts because he didn't apply those thoughts to them, or so they thought. In truth, Jordan did play a role in precipitating the holocaust, or whatever thing he thought he was doing. I wonder what Eugene really thought of his colleague Pascual.

It seems that with increasing gun violence at home—but not because of the horrendous violence abroad—people are being forced to question how other people think. Our legal system is largely based on actions, not thoughts. Red flag and restraining orders are the exceptions.

Paying Attention to How We Think

Indifference to people's intentions provides a foundation for justice and a swamp for mental health. I think it comes from our positivist attitude that doing one's job is all that's important. But it isn't.

A culture that is attentive to family, community, children, learning, growth, change, and balance, both in ourselves and in our ecology, is aware of emotion. This is what our current crises are pointing us toward. If you become more aware of the whole system, then you become more emotionally aware in general, and, in that, mental balance and health can grow.

The foundation of mental health is emotional, but we don't know how to be emotional and be effective. It is one thing to separate church and state. It's quite another to separate spiritual meaning and behavior. This is a problem for the whole culture, but changing it can only happen individually.

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