

IMAGES OF MAN AND PUBLIC OPINION

BY CHARLES Y. GLOCK

As social science defines ever more precisely the respective roles of free will and determinism in directing human behavior, man's conception of his own nature changes. As a consequence, his opinions on a vast array of political, economic, and social problems also change. Dr. Glock presents a very thoughtful, penetrating analysis and discussion of some of the significant implications of this observation.

Charles Y. Glock is Director of the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley. The following paper was his Presidential Address, presented at the annual Conferences of the American Association for Public Opinion Research and the World Association for Public Opinion Research, Excelsior Springs, Missouri, on May 9, 1964.

WHAT ought an AAPOR Presidential Address be? This is a question that every AAPOR President must ask himself. The possible answers, it would seem, are virtually unlimited. A President may decide that this is an occasion to preview the results of a piece of research on which he has been working. He may choose as his task challenging the membership with a new idea or perspective. There are always methodological problems to be solved, and a President might use his address as a vehicle for suggesting solutions. Or, he might decide that by Saturday evening the membership has had enough of heady fare, and that he can best serve the general good by seeking to entertain.

Theoretically, AAPOR Presidents may do any of these things. In practice, however, they tend all to do the same thing. Without, I would assume, much interaction among them as to what they ought to do, AAPOR Presidents seem uniformly to come to the conclusion that their task is to broaden our horizons: to provide new perspectives from which to view old problems or to challenge our imagination with wholly new possibilities for the future. Thus, in 1950, Paul Lazarsfeld added to our perspectives by reminding us of our responsibilities to future historians. In 1960, Herbert Hyman challenged us with the potentialities of using reference group theory to heighten our understanding of public opinion. Robert Carlson, in 1961, showed us new ways to conceive of our relationships with clients. And, last year, Joseph Klapper called upon us to give new attention to problems still unsolved in the field of communications research.

This drive to be prophetic on a grand or smaller scale reflects, I sus-

pect, the need in any organization to find ways to constantly renew the commitment and indeed the faith of its membership. Viewed in this light, a Presidential Address is a ritual, but a singularly important one to organizational survival and growth. The effect, however, is to impose an inordinate pressure on a President to say something meaningful to our collective task. Personally, I am uncomfortable in assuming the mantle of prophet. Yet, there is no escape. One must risk the possibility of failure, and this is the risk that I shall now proceed to take.

The idea that what was controversial yesterday is commonplace today, like most aphorisms, does not wholly depict reality. Yet, reflecting on American society over the last three or four decades, the aphorism would appear to contain much more than a grain of truth. In almost every realm of social, political, and economic life, we are willing to countenance ideas today that, if they could know about them, would cause the generation of the '10's and '20's to turn over in their graves. The idea that it is quite proper for the government to guarantee the civil rights of Negroes, or that a criminal ought not necessarily be punished for his crimes, or that medical practice ought to be socialized would be anathema to our immediate forebears.

Such radical social change is not a common characteristic of societies. There are societies that have remained virtually unchanged for centuries. It is not enough, therefore, to assume that change is natural and to attribute the changes that are occurring in American society to an inexorable impulse toward change. Both the fact of change and its character call for explanations. Present changes in American society are intimately tied up with public opinion. They are shifting the issues on which people are being asked to have opinions and the grounds on which they form opinions. As a consequence, changes in American society are of particular relevance to the analyst of public opinion, who must share the task of explanation with other students of society.

The proposition I should like to advance and defend tonight is that the changes in American opinion that I have referred to—the fact that we are willing to countenance ideas today that we would have rejected out of hand a generation or two ago—are in large measure a result of changes in the image of man that has traditionally informed American opinion. The idea that opinions are influenced by an image of man may not immediately ring a bell, and it may well require the balance of my paper to make the point clear. As a beginning, however, let me simply assert that how a person feels about almost any public issue is inevitably shaped by his understanding of man's nature and what can and cannot be expected of man as a result of his nature.

Perhaps the basic factor governing the images of man that have pre-

vailed in America over its history is the amount of free will man has been thought to have. At one extreme, man has been conceived as having a virtually infinite amount of free will. This image of man does not countenance the possibility that man is in any sense a victim of his environment. Rather, what he is and what he does is completely up to him. A conception of man as having no free will has also informed American society. This view is at the polar extreme to the one which sees man's freedom as infinite. It holds that man is wholly a creature of his inheritance and of his environment, that every choice and decision he makes is inexorably determined by forces beyond his control.

Between these two extreme views of man's nature, still a third image has emerged from the give and take of American life. This one recognizes that man's freedom is limited by his inheritance and by his environment but refuses to accept the idea that man is wholly determined. This third view allows obviously for a considerable amount of variation with respect to how much freedom man is considered to have. Yet, to hold any variation of this view is basically different from seeing man as wholly determined or wholly free.

It is difficult to locate, clearly and definitely, the source of any of these images of man. Roughly speaking, however, the image that man is possessed of virtually unlimited free will is grounded in the history of Western theological thought. God created man in his own image but gave man the freedom to choose between right and wrong and, consequently, the ability to guide his own salvation. This idea has been secularized, so that man's destiny in this world as well as the next becomes subject to man's control.

It is even more difficult to pin down the source of the idea that man is wholly determined. There is a deterministic element in the predestination of Calvinism: the idea that man was pre-ordained by God to his place in life is deterministic. However, in theological thought the determinism derives from God. Karl Marx undoubtedly contributed to secularizing the idea that man lacks freedom through his concept of economic determinism. Moreover, the idea that man is wholly determined has perhaps gained currency through science's implicit commitment to the discovery of invariant empirical and theoretical laws in nature.

The equivocal position—that man is neither as free nor as determined as the extremes hold—derives to a considerable extent, I would think, from the social sciences. Beginning in the last century but most notably in the last three to four decades, the social sciences have whittled away at the idea that man's free will was unbounded, and have demonstrated that man cannot entirely escape the influence of the social forces that surround him.

Whatever their sources, each of these three images of man provide different perspectives from which to view the world and to form opinions about it. The perspectives derive in part from the images themselves and in part from the beliefs, values, and norms that have come to be associated with them. The ordinary person is not likely to be explicitly aware of what his image of man is or even that he holds such an image. Yet, in order for him to form an opinion, every person must have some idea in his mind, however vague, of what people are basically like.

A person who implicitly perceives man as having unbounded free will is, in our society, likely to have also internalized the idea that man is to exercise his freedom responsibly. In his judgments of another, consequently, he will base his opinion on whether or not the person has, in fact, acted responsibly. Broadly speaking, the sign of a responsible person is one who, having the freedom to choose his own destiny, has chosen so wisely that it is reflected in the rewards that the society has bestowed upon him. Conversely, a person who has not received the rewards of society must *ipso facto* have made his choices irresponsibly. This image of man may produce charity but it is not likely to engender compassion for the person who has failed according to society's standards. His situation, after all, is his own fault; having made his own bed, he must be content to lie in it.

Applying this image to two contemporary issues—the Negro revolution and socialized medicine—it is unlikely to provoke sympathy in either case. A person who has internalized the idea that man is free yet responsible is likely to feel that the plight of the Negro is no one's fault but his own. Let him change his ways and he too can succeed. The Negro has no right to ask for special privileges. By his actions, he has shown that he does not deserve them. With regard to socialized medicine, the person holding this image is likely to say that physicians, after all, have earned their status in society through their own initiative and effort. It is not right that they should be deprived of this status, nor, indeed, is it right that persons who have failed to use their freedom wisely ought now to be given easy access to medical services. If they had acted properly, they would have had the wherewithal to pay for them.

A person who has internalized an extreme deterministic image of man will perceive the world and his fellow man quite differently. Here, whether a person has succeeded or failed by society's standards is no sign of his worth. Since failure and success are both determined, it follows that the successful do not deserve the rewards they have received nor the failures the punishments. Consequently, it is right that society be reorganized to set things straight. The successful may justi-

fably be called upon to make sacrifices to relieve the deprived. Moreover, it is not proper to demand that the deprived be required to show any worth to have their deprivations relieved. The person who consciously holds this image of man is likely to experience some difficulty in reconciling his commitment to determinism with his apparent freedom to manipulate. He may do this by deciding that there are an enlightened few, of whom he is one, who have been able to transcend the effects of determinism because of their knowledge of how it operates. Being enlightened, he has a responsibility to set things straight and, unlike the determined masses, the power to do so.

The person who views the situation of the Negro from this perspective will understandably come to quite different conclusions from the person who imagines man to be entirely free. Whereas the latter is likely to refuse the Negro any help, the former is likely to insist that the Negro, because his condition can in no way be attributed to him, must automatically be granted the same rewards as the white. Emphasis will be on granting social rewards, not on ensuring equal access to them. What is bypassed in this conception of the issue, then, is the Negro's responsibility once he has been given access to the rewards of the larger society. The deterministic image provides a different perspective for viewing the issue of socialized medicine as well. Physicians have their privileges not as a result of anything that can be attributed to them, nor are those who are deprived of medical services responsible for their plight. Because no one is responsible, the ultimate good becomes one of equality, imposed, however, by the enlightened few.

This description of the free-will and deterministic images of man is ideal-typical. It is unlikely that either image will be represented in these extreme forms in reality. It seems nonetheless fair to say that there are people who come close to having internalized one or the other image in its purest, or most extreme, form.

The third image of man is the most difficult to describe. This is because it encompasses a variety of sub-images. Moreover, it is the most subject to change as a result of new scientific evidence specifying the ways in which man is conditioned by his environment. In a modal sense, what the image presupposes is that man has free will but that it is necessarily limited and conditioned by attributes he has inherited, by the way he has been socialized, and by the historical forces that have shaped the character of his society.

To a limited extent, it is possible to refer to evidence to decide what man can be held accountable for and what must be attributed to deterministic elements. By now, for example, the evidence is fairly conclusive that the homosexual has not become one out of rational free choice. However, on most issues the scientific evidence is still so slight

as hardly to constitute a basis for deciding whether human behavior is determined or not. Moreover, few people are informed in any detail of what the scientific evidence is. Consequently, a central characteristic of this image of man, at this stage of history, is an open mind and an awareness, through observation and through popular exposure to the results of social science, that man is conditioned as well as free.

A person holding to this image of man could be expected to view the plight of the Negro sympathetically, to recognize that it is in large part a result of forces over which the Negro has not had the power to exercise control, and to support efforts to change the situation so that the Negro is given the same access to the rewards of the larger society as anyone else. Unlike the determinist, however, the person holding this equivocal image of man is not likely to grant that the Negro ought have more than equality of access. He is likely to want to leave it to the Negro to decide whether he wants to make the effort to achieve, once the conditions are established to allow him to achieve. On the issue of socialized medicine, this image is also likely to invoke a sympathetic response. However, the image is likely to be respectful of the achievements of the physician, and the concern to serve the deprived will be joined with a concern that the physician not be unduly compromised either.

But what, you may now well ask, has all this to do with my earlier assertion that recent changes in the climate of opinion in America are related to changes in the image of man that is informing American society? Of the three images of man I have portrayed, the first one—or something close to it—was dominant in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and undoubtedly had a large influence on shaping the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, on the development of our system of law, on our economic system, and, in perhaps more subtle ways, on the evolution of the American family.

The element of freedom is given very manifest expression, for example, in the Bill of Rights. Freedom of religion, speech, and the press, and the right of petition only make sense if man, by nature, is capable of exercising these prerogatives. A relatively unbounded free will certainly allows man to do so. The element of responsibility is implicit in the Constitution but is expressed more manifestly in the legal system and the character of the sanctions it has traditionally imposed. The traditional concept of punishment in American law assumes that man is capable of free choice, and therefore of acting responsibly. The American economic system, too, has traditionally placed very high regard on individual initiative and effort.

The image of man as free yet responsible was the image that primarily informed American society at its outset, and today our institu-

tions still largely reflect its power. However, over the last hundred years, but particularly over the last thirty-five to forty years, the basic tenets of the image have come to be challenged by the modified image of man that has been so largely stimulated by the social sciences.

The full effects of any change in the image of man are not likely to be felt immediately. It takes time for the new image to be disseminated. Moreover, it can be expected that a new image will increasingly call into question and gradually modify and change the beliefs, values, and norms that the earlier image generated.

What we are witnessing in our time, I would suggest, is the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a long process of change as society comes increasingly to feel the impact of what the social sciences are learning about man's nature. There appears to be no doubt that the process has already started.

The changes wrought so far by this emerging image of man have been greatest in those parts of our society which are most subject to being informed by social scientists. Particularly affected have been those institutions whose task it is to deal with the problems of so-called "deviant behavior" in society. Ideas about ways to deal with the delinquent, the poverty stricken, the mentally ill, the criminal have changed radically over the last generation. No longer, for example, is charity animated by a concept that the poor are poor through some fault of their own, through a failure to meet their responsibilities as free men. In fact, we no longer feel comfortable with the word "charity." Other words associated with the old image of man have also tended to be discarded. People may be mentally ill but they are no longer crazy, for example.

There are other areas of society—the economic order, religion, the family—that have perhaps been less subject to the influence of new social science knowledge about the nature of man. The resistance exhibited by these institutions rests, I suspect, partly in a particularly high degree of commitment to the individualism inherent in the traditional image and partly in their being less exposed to the direct influence of the social sciences. Nevertheless, the corporation in its adoption of scientific personnel practices, the church in its quest to demythologize the scriptures, and the family in its concern about the effects of parental behavior on the child all reveal that they have not remained wholly unaffected by the new ideology.

The relevance of what I have been saying to the phenomenon of public opinion ought now to be self-evident. I have already cited enough examples to indicate that the changing image of man is affecting the character and content of the issues that become the subjects of public opinion. It is also influencing the grounds on which opinions

are formed. Not everyone—in fact, perhaps only a minority—has internalized the new image. There are people who still feel that the plight of the Negro is no one's fault but his own. Those who continue to identify with the traditional image, however, are being increasingly put on the defensive, not only on the Negro question but on all issues that implicitly or explicitly involve basic conceptions about man's nature. Because it has placed the advocates of the traditional image on the defensive, the modified, equivocal image of man, even though it may lose some of the battles, would appear to be destined eventually to win the war.

The deterministic image of man—the third of my three types—does not at present enjoy wide currency, nor has it ever been particularly salient in American society. However, there are increasing occasions when its effects appear to exhibit themselves in American life. There are some, for example, who are committed to the view that all so-called “criminal acts” are beyond the responsibility of the actor. Among spokesmen for the Negro's cause, there are some who implicitly advocate that the Negro be granted more than equal access to the rewards of society. These are signs that even this image of man is a viable one and that, as students of public opinion, we cannot ignore its emergence as a possible third force in shaping the content and climate of American opinion.

It is evident that the strains of these disparate images pervade the collective mind of America and generate much of the social discord and political strife that blacken the contemporary American scene. Not only conflicting interests are at odds. In a more basic sense, many current problems are rooted in differences between conflicting, and perhaps irreconcilable, images of man and his social environment.

On reflection, some of you may harbor the suspicion that what I have been saying could as easily have been said using the more usual categories of liberalism and conservatism. I would not argue against the connection, but would suggest that images of man is the more basic concept, that it illuminates the meaning of liberalism and conservatism, and not the other way around.

Whether or not I am correct in this regard, and whether or not the concept—images of man—can be more generally useful in informing our understanding of public opinion and the future conduct of public opinion research, I leave, my dear friends, to you to decide.