

## Civilisationens åtta dödssynder

*K.Lorenz*

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This is a diatribe against the curses of modern civilization and how they threaten to destroy us all. What the author in particular inveighs against is

1) Overpopulation, how people are forced into close proximity with each other, and how that goes against the grain of human kindness and hospitality, by unnatural oversimplification.

2) The degeneration of our natural habitat, which not only threatens our material well-being but even more so our spiritual, how it destroys our ability to appreciate beauty and our reverence for Creation. He does liken the expansion of cities to the growth of tumors, replacing the intricate and viable, with the simple and primitive. How much more attractive is not a village road, which has evolved through generations, than a pre-fabricated road, that looks the same everywhere.

3) The increased mindless competition between men, which deprives people of the time and inclination for reflective thinking, which is the hallmark of the most fundamental in man.

4) The technological progress, especially in pharmacology, which deprives men of the possibility to achieve the state of joy that is only accessible through trial and frustration. Pleasure and satisfaction can of course be achieved through the eradication of unease and pain, but true joy need sacrifices. A life devoid of tragedy and failure is an empty life.

5) Genetic degeneration. A species which no longer is subjected to external pressure becomes indulgent as to intra-species selection, such as the absurdities displayed by sexual selection. What will indeed prevent parasitic behavior, genetically driven, to propagate and take over? The traditional and universally accepted principles of justice have in the past acted as a safe-guard against anti-social excesses, which leads to the next danger.

6) The break-down of traditions. The author points to strong analogies between the evolution of traditions and biological evolution. How things are tested and only the most valuable are preserved. This development requires a piecemeal change, no drastic reforms. Just because something is old does not necessarily mean that it is evil or even useless. Here the arguments of the author is the most dated, written as they are in the immediate aftermath of 1968. He views the current generation revolt with an alarmism which in retrospect appears a bit ludicrous. He speaks about the younger generation exercising against their elders something very much in the nature of ethnic hatred on par with anti-semitism. He argues that the reasons for that are pathological and symptoms of immaturity and deficient upbringing.

7) The power of the mass media to indoctrinate people, and their vulnerability to fashion and influence. He is in particular critical of behaviorism as a reductive and fashion-driven approach to human psychology, which denies the evolutionary history that has formed man, and instead sees him as a clean slate, who is entirely at the mercy of his

upbringing<sup>1</sup>. In particular the idea that every man is potentially equally valuable is an example of this attitude. It lends itself to social engineering and manipulation, and as the author is at pains to point out, there is no difference between the West and the Soviet states. While the indoctrination is obvious in the latter with its red banners and evolutionary slogans, blinds us to the consumerism of the West with its brash commercial messages that bombard us. In the Soviet states, nothing is wasted, the author somewhat sentimentally and naively asserts.

and finally there is the most obvious threat of them all, the eight deadly sin, namely 8) The threat of nuclear annihilation. Acute and terrifying as this threat may be, it is ironically, the most manageable of them all, because its nature is clear to everyone, as is what has to be done. The author predicts that mankind will survive this threat, and forty odd years on, his prediction seems so far hold water. Worse are the other sins which are far more insidious and more difficult to identify and understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Lorenz blames the status of physics for this approach. The idea that everything has to be measured and modeled mathematically and reduced to the simplest principles, even when a field of inquiry has not yet reached the required maturity. And even physics, he points out, rests on the power of the human intellect and desires, which belong, if anything, to humanism.