

Twitter Thread by <https://tinyurl.com/1ftbk46h>



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[@Aelkus](#)



half of this website believes that all of your problems can be solved by going to therapy

another half thinks that the entire psychological profession is fake and after some vaguely construed revolution mental health will be solved

what's funny about this is that nothing about it new <https://t.co/VH1BF8e68J>

I wish this wasn't paywalled because the books Lasch reviewed (in 1976!) sound very familiar. The same kind of dumb debates on this subject that occur constantly here are inherited from boomers

the point Lasch makes towards the end is that all of these books are grasping towards something that neither therapy or politics fully covers, even if both are obviously relevant.

but first, he does a tour through the books. he encounters people who believe all character traits are a product of "propaganda" and "conditioning" that can be fixed with therapy or therapy-like processes, and people who think therapy is a distraction from politics

he notes where both have a point. the people that take refuge in politics and denounce mental health, he often observes, do so because it provides an excuse for the inability to resolve personal anxieties.

at the same time, it isn't clear that consciousness-raising -- consisting of therapy and therapy-like processes can help, especially because they seem to advocate making less investment in others and "live for the moment" (sound familiar?)

Now Lasch at last offers his opinion without leaning on those of others. An obsession with "self-preservation" and "psychic survival" is rooted in a "weakening of social ties" and the "warlike character of the social environment"

Lasch's argument is that "narcissism" is not a psychological defect but a survival strategy to social changes, social changes that are not really attributable to politics or economics.

"A warlike society tends to produce men and women who are at heart antisocial. It should therefore not surprise us to find that the narcissist, although he conforms to social norms for fear of external retribution, often thinks of himself as an outlaw...."

" and sees others in the same way, "as basically dishonest and unreliable, or only reliable because of external pressures....The ethic of self-preservation and psychic survival is rooted, then, not merely in objective conditions...but in the subjective experience of emptiness"

" It reflects the conviction—as much a projection of inner anxieties as a perception of the way things are—that envy and exploitation dominate even the most intimate relations. The cult of personal relations, which becomes increasingly intense as..."

"..the hope of political solutions recedes, conceals a thoroughgoing disenchantment with personal relations, just as the cult of sensuality implies a repudiation of sensuality in all but its most primitive forms. "

So social and political problems do not originate in "privatism" -- people rightly are concerned with private life because "deep and lasting friendships, love affairs, and marriages" become more "difficult to achieve"

and people's search for private sanctuary is natural as social life becomes more "warlike and barbaric." However, consciousness-raising and therapy error by making analysis personal problems purely "personal and private"

Lasch himself is mostly reviewing the work of others in this article. When he himself, in later books and articles, discusses his own diagnoses and solutions we see the final inheritance of contemporary problems from the boomers.

Lasch, for all of his insights about the social background of psychic distress, has little remedy beyond a quixotic movement backwards that reverses the social changes of the last 150 years.

which partly explains why Lasch has become more popular today in an era of online e-trad culture and name-drops of Lasch are popular in conservative publications and left publications that often bandwagon with them

Lasch's idealized solution is hitting a "git reset" on society and going back to a social world dominated by small artisans, craftsmen, and proprietors. This search for individual competence is correlated with meaningful "traditional values"

Whether or not you agree with this view of what Good Society was like prior to some supposed deluge, history doesn't go backwards even if today's social conditions are always temporary.

And its easy to see vulgar echoes of this romantic longing for a perhaps idealized past in the "this is what they took from you" posts about a 1950s family in front of a Disney World castle

But for all of the faults of Lasch and the people he criticizes, the value in looking at this debate is simply that it frees the mind of the various dumb social media versions of the positions the protagonists in it took

in the time it took to do this thread, several people found unpaywalled versions of the Lasch article:

<https://t.co/wguZ0av3Ho>

<https://t.co/R6COwVdidF>

for an overview of Lasch's life and times see <https://t.co/mriffTwbDz>