The Evolution of Brainwashing in the 20th Century

Joel Dimsdale, MD

Saturday: JANUARY 15, 1:30 — via ZOOM
Monthly Lecture

Brief Biosketch: Joel E. Dimsdale, MD

Dr. Dimsdale attended Carleton College and then Stanford University, where he obtained an MA in Sociology and an MD degree. He obtained psychiatric training at MGH and was on the faculty of Harvard Medical School from 1976-1985, when he moved to University of California, San Diego, where he is now Regent Edward A. Dickson Emeritus Professor and Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus.

His clinical subspecialty is consultation psychiatry. He is a former career awardee of the American Heart Association and is past-president of the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research, the American Psychosomatic Society, and the Society of Behavioral Medicine. He is editor-in-chief emeritus of Psychosomatic Medicine and is a previous guest editor of Circulation and former editor-at-large of Journal Psychosomatic Research. He has been a consultant to the President’s Commission on Mental Health, the Institute of Medicine, the National Academies of Science, the Department of Justice, NASA, and NIH, and was Advisor to the UC Regents Health Sciences Committee. He was a member of the DSM 5 task force and chaired the workgroup studying somatic symptom disorders.

His research interests include stress physiology, ethnicity, and sleep. He is the author of >500 publications, including Anatomy of Malice: the enigma of the Nazi War Criminals, Yale University Press, 2016, and Dark Persuasion: The History of Brainwashing from Pavlov to Social Media, Yale University Press, 2021.

From suicide bombers to antivaxxers, from kidnap victims to cult members, evidence of our vulnerability to indoctrination surrounds us. Prisoners embrace their captors. Citizens accept propaganda in defiance of available facts. People accused of crimes make false confessions. Extremists commit devastating acts, harming themselves and others in the name of ideologies that seem unreasonable to the majority. The 20th-century story of the development and dissemination of coercive techniques is a devastating one in which religious leaders, Nobel laureates, physicians, university academics, intelligence operatives, criminals, law enforcement agents, and military and political leaders all participated, causing immeasurable harm to countless individuals.
The Scholars Notebook is issued monthly during the academic year, except December, by the San Diego Independent Scholars (SDIS), a nonprofit organization founded in 1982.

The mission of SDIS is to promote opportunities for active learning and scholarship, both for its membership and for the San Diego community.

Public service activities of SDIS include: (1) monthly public lectures presented during the academic year; (2) discussion groups held in public libraries or online; (3) small grants awarded on a competitive basis for research projects; and (4) various cooperative educational and other projects with local organizations.

More information about SDIS and its activities is available at www.sdscholars.org.

Questions: sandiegoindependentscholars@gmail.com

SCHOLAR’S NOTEBOOK
JANUARY 2022—Contents

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HELEN HAWKINS RESEARCH GRANT AWARDS

HOW IT HAPPENED

In 1991, the Board of San Diego Independent Scholars created the Helen Hawkins Memorial Research Fund, in memory of a founding member, Helen Hawkins, who died in 1989. This Research Fund succeeded the earlier Kolar Fund whose monies had been depleted. Hawkins’ family contributed $2,000 after learning that the new fund was named in Helen’s honor. Current SDIS members can and often do make tax-deductible contributions to help sustain the fund.

Helen Hawkins was instrumental in filing the paperwork for incorporating SDIS as a not-for-profit organization. Hawkins earned a PhD in History from UCSD. She also studied choral music at Tanglewood and international economics at Oxford as an undergraduate. Her professional associations included the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, KPBS-TV, and the History Departments at UCSD, SDSU, and Mesa College. She was also a co-founder and first president of the local chapter of NOW.

2022 APPLICATIONS DUE FEBRUARY 28, 2022

2021 grants were suspended because of Covid. The Board of Directors is hopeful that this year it will be possible for an awarded grant to be used. Current SDIS members are invited to apply for travel or research grants.

Grant approval is based on the quality of the applicant’s idea, its originality, merit, credibility, feasibility, and potential for solving or giving a new perspective on a significant problem or illuminating a social, literary or scientific phenomenon. At the May SDIS general meeting, a winning applicant will briefly describe projected work and how the Hawkins Award is to be used. Upon completion of the work, awardee will give a talk about it to a future SDIS general meeting. Applicants must have been members for at least one year. Full-time post-secondary teaching faculty is excluded.

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WORKS IN PROGRESS

The Works in Progress Group met for the first time on Thursday, November 18. Three writers submitted extracts from their memoirs in progress; two offered sections of their works reviewing some of the larger lessons learned earlier in life. Another writer presented an opening segment in which a recent interaction had led him into a narrative beginning in the past. The meeting included six participants, the writers and the chairperson who led the conversation. Although the group was small, all three extracts were discussed. Those who attended were curious about the earlier experiences that led the first two writers to their conclusions. These writers agreed to discuss some of the narratives that preceded their closing chapters. Because of the impending holidays at the end of December, we decided to schedule our next meeting at 3 pm. on the third Thursday in January, the 20th.

Ken Kraus
The Biosciences Group is currently investigating differences between (1) intuitive thought, defined as mental mechanisms that do not rely on analytical reasoning, and (2) other processes that are more analytical, mathematical, or logical.

In our last meeting, this topic sparked a spirited discussion concerning the pros and cons of the two thinking styles. The impetus for discussion was a video in which Daniel Kahneman described concepts from his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, where “thinking fast” roughly corresponds to intuitive thought and “thinking slow” to analytical thought. That video is found at youtube.com/watch?v=C-4MM8sd3BE.

In our discussion, adherents of analytical thinking emphasized that Kahneman’s research delineates how fast (intuitive) thinking is fraught by numerous biases, some of which can cause people to make disastrous financial decisions. Indeed, Kahneman’s influence on economic theory led to his Nobel Prize in Economics, even though Kahneman is a psychologist.

Other group members emphasized that Kahneman’s formulations have been a gold mine for advertisers, who often pitch their ads to those factors that influence fast (non-analytical) decision making. But do we really want to encourage such advertising?

Another person reported that Kahneman’s data have also affected the development of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. He recommended the video *Stuart Russell: 3 Principles for Creating Safer AI* because Kahneman and Russell frequently collaborate in developing new ideas.

In January we will continue to explore these concepts, this time from the perspective of Malcolm Gladwell’s book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, which extols the advantages of intuitive thinking. We recommend that you read *Blink*, but persons who have not done so are still welcome, because Gladwell’s main premises will be summarized at the beginning of the hour.

We all have had considerable experience with both analytical and intuitive thought. Furthermore, many of us have strong feelings about the efficacy of each in specific situations.

We welcome your insights and opinions on January 14 at 1:00, as we attempt to sort out issues that are important to many aspects of everyday living.

*Dorothy Parker*
Colloquy Café
1:30 p.m. — Wednesday — January 19 — via Zoom

For not the first time, but rarely, this study group is addressing the same concept for two successive sessions. Expecting to complete its consideration of “critical race theory” at the December 15 meeting, participants soon realized the confusion, controversy and lack of understanding surrounding this subject.

Attempts to define CRT, as it is often referred to, only led to complicated explanations and more and more words. And so, those present agreed to accept the definition of CRT as stated in Wikipedia, and to use that as the basis for a discussion of CRT at the January 19 meeting.

That definition: “Critical race theory is a cross-disciplinary intellectual and social movement that began in the U.S. in the post Civil Rights era as 1960s civil rights laws were being eroded and schools were being re-segregated.”

It is an academic concept over 40 years old, a social construct embedded in our legal system and policies.

As always, Colloquy Cafe meetings take place at 1:30 on the 3rd Wednesday afternoon of each month, by Zoom. The link to enter the discussion enables participation; it is sent several days before the scheduled session to both regular members of the group and to other SDIS members who desire to take part.

If you would like to sample Colloquy, please contact me.

Gerry Horwitz

Physical Sciences Group
2 p.m. — First Wednesday — January 5 — via Zoom

The Physical Sciences group completed chapter 7 of David J. Griffiths’ Introduction to Elementary Particles, which included: development of the Dirac Equation, review of Electromagnetic Theory (E&M) in terms of the four-vector potential, and solving the Dirac Equation for plane wave electron solutions, and the E&M equations for plane wave photon solutions. Next, it used those solutions to develop the Feynman Diagram rules for Quantum Electrodynamics (QED), including such processes as electron-muon scattering, electron-electron scattering, photon-electron scattering (Compton Scattering), pair creation and pair annihilation, etc. A number of these processes were then calculated to lowest order, allowing us to actually obtain the dominant contributions to the cross-sections for the processes. In addition, we calculated the lifetime of positronium (electron and positron in a hydrogen-like bound state). The chapter concluded with an introduction to higher-order Feynman Diagrams, the problem with infinities that appear in these higher-order terms and the renormalization methods that resolve that problem. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, January 5, at 2 p.m., when we will start chapter 8—the development of Feynman Diagrams for Quantum Chromodynamics (QCD)—the strong interactions.

Alvin Halpern
Because our December DVD arrived cracked, our meeting on Wednesday, January 5 will once again feature *Blinded by the Light*, a 2019 British comedy about a young Pakistani immigrant in England whose strict father disparages his love of rock music and his desire to write poetry. Bruce Springsteen's music (yes, *Blinded by the Light* is a famous Springsteen song) plays a prominent role in the movie, with twelve of his songs part of the soundtrack.

In December, we replaced the damaged DVD with the one scheduled for January: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy and released that very year by Warner Brothers, who had pioneered the cinematic musical with the Vitaphone film we had viewed the month before, *The Jazz Singer*.

Members noted how quickly the musical evolved between 1927 and 1933, and how much better the sound and the photography were in *Gold Diggers*. They were also delighted by the always amazing choreography of Busby Berkeley, who in addition to proto-psychedelic dance numbers that resembled kaleidoscope images and free-for-all extravaganzas featuring neon violins and scantily clad tap lines, provided a finale which depicted through movement and song the deepening sadness of the Great Depression. The dialogue was snappy, the plot sweet though idiotic, and the entertainment abundant.

*We're in the money! We're in the money! We've got a lot of what it takes to get along! We're in the money! The skies are sunny! Ol' Man Depression, you are through, you done us wrong!*
The SDIS Inside Politics Study Group meets on Zoom on the first Saturday of every month at 10 a.m. However, for the month of January, 2022, that day falls on Saturday, January 1, New Years Day. It is not only a holiday, but a day that many Americans celebrate by watching parades and football on television, and/or by partying with family and friends. This is also, of course, the day after staying up late celebrating New Years Eve at another party or by watching the ball come down at midnight in New York City.

Because of these circumstances, I have decided to announce an exception to our regular date and time for our class in January. We will experiment by holding our January class in conjunction with another class I facilitate every month, called Second Saturday. That class will meet on January 8, 2022, at 10 a.m. So we will be combining both classes.

Members of each class will receive a combined Agenda, and a Zoom link, in early January, and both groups will then be able to click on the Zoom link a few minutes before class begins on Saturday January 8, at 10 a.m. This is the same procedure we use every month.

I am really looking forward to this combined class for our first meeting of 2022. We will review the political highlights of 2021, and try to anticipate the major issues of 2022, as well as discuss the hot political topics of the day. The Second Saturday class has more members than the SDIS class, including a few members from other cities and states, who also link in from where they live.

It will be interesting to see if the political thoughts of the members of each class differ. Each class has developed a personality of its own, of course, and I expect combining classes that day will result in an exciting exchange of political dialog. I urge all members of SDIS who have an interest in politics to participate in this unique experiment on January 8, 2022. Click on the Zoom link a few minutes before class begins on January 8 and you will automatically be connected to the combined class. Thank you for participating in this experiment so that members of SDIS Inside Politics may enjoy their New Years Day Holiday and still enjoy participating in our monthly political discussion. — Al

Al Korobkin
READING EXPERIENCE
10 a.m. — Third Monday — January 17 — via Zoom

WAR is the current theme on which this group is concentrating. *The Great War and Modern Memory* by the British historian Paul Fussell, focusing on English writers who participated in and wrote about World War I, was the subject of November’s meeting.

Another British writer, the well-known George Orwell, wrote about his experiences in the intricate politics as well as the fighting of the 1930s Spanish Civil War, in *Homage to Catalonia*, which the group analyzed at its December meeting.

January’s subject will be *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, about the Vietnam War, in which the American author took part. Just as the three wars were quite different, the books about them, and the authors, differ greatly in approach. This meeting will take place at 10 a.m. January 17; all Reading Experience discussions happen by Zoom and all occur on the third Monday of the month. SDIS members interested in attending Reading Experience, either for ongoing participation or for one time interest, should contact me for the Zoom link.

Gerry Horwitz

“They carried the soldier’s greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment.”
# January 2022
SDIS meetings and events listed are via Zoom

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*Inquiries: sdisask@gmail.com
Items preceded by N are by North County Village.
North County Village, Contact Jack Kerr: jek123@msn.com.*