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## Time Perspective and Morale (1942)

Studies in unemployment show how a long-drawn-out idleness affects all parts of a person's life. Thrown out of a job, the individual tries to keep hoping. When he finally gives up, he frequently restricts his action much more than he has to. Even though he has plenty of time, he begins to neglect his home duties. He may cease to leave his immediate neighborhood; even his thinking and his wishes become narrow. This atmosphere spreads to the children, and they, too, become narrow-minded even in their ambitions and dreams. In other words, the individual and the family as a whole present a complete picture of low morale.

An analysis of this behavior shows the importance of that psychological factor which commonly is called "hope." Only when the person gives up hope does he stop "actively reaching out"; he loses his energy, he ceases planning, and, finally, he even stops wishing for a better future. Only then does he shrink to a primitive and passive life.

Hope means that "sometime in the future, the real situation will be changed so that it will equal my wishes." Hope means a similarity between the individual's "level of expectation" and his "irreality level of wishes." The picture presented by this "psychological future" seldom corresponds to what actually happens later. The individual may see his future as too rosy or too bleak; frequently the character of the psychological future vacillates between hope and despair. But, regardless of whether the individual's picture of the future is correct or incorrect at a given time, this picture deeply affects the mood and the action of the individual at that time.

The psychological future is part of what L. K. Frank has called "time perspective." The life-space of an individual, far from being limited to what he considers the present situation, includes the future, the present, and also the past. Actions, emotions, and certainly the morale of an individual at any instant depend upon his total time perspective.

The conduct of the unemployed, then, is an example of how time perspective may lower morale. How morale may, on the contrary, be heightened by time perspective is illustrated by the conduct of the Zionists in Germany shortly after Hitler came to power. The great majority of Jews in Germany had believed for decades that the pogroms of Czarist Russia "couldn't happen here." When Hitler came to power, therefore, the social ground on which they stood suddenly was swept from under their feet. Naturally, many became desperate and committed suicide; with nothing to stand on, they could see no future life worth living.

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The time perspective of the numerically small Zionist group, on the other hand, had been different. Although they too had not considered pogroms in Germany a probability, they had been aware of their possibility. For decades they had tried to study their own sociological problems realistically, advocating and promoting a program that looked far ahead. In other words, they had a time perspective which included a psychological past of surviving adverse conditions for thousands of years and a meaningful and inspiring goal for the future. As the result of such a time perspective, this group showed high morale—despite a present which was judged by them to be no less foreboding than by others. Instead of inactivity and encystment in the face of a difficult situation—a result of such limited time perspective as that characteristic of the unemployed—the Zionists with a long-range and realistic time perspective showed initiative and organized planning. It is worth noticing how much the high morale of this small group contributed to sustaining the morale of a large section of the non-Zionist Jews of Germany. Here, as in many other cases, a small group with high morale became a rallying point for larger masses.

Time perspective seems, indeed, to be sufficiently important for morale to warrant a more thorough analysis.

### Development of Time Perspective

The infant lives essentially in the present. His goals are immediate goals; when he is distracted, he "forgets" quickly. As an individual grows older, more and more of his past and his future affect his present mood and action. The goals of the school child may already include promotion to the next grade at the end of the year. Years later, as the father of a family, the same person will often think in terms of decades when planning his life. Practically everyone of consequence in the history of humanity—in religion, politics, or science—has been dominated by a time perspective which has reached out far into future generations, and which frequently was based on an awareness of an equally long past. But a large time perspective is not peculiar to great men. A hundred and thirty billion dollars of life insurance in force in the United States offer an impressive bit of evidence for the degree to which a relatively distant psychological future, not connected with the well-being of one's own person, affects the everyday life of the average citizen.

Aside from the broadness of the time perspective, there is a further aspect important for morale. The young child does not distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality. To a great extent wishes and fears affect his judgment. As an individual becomes mature and gains "self-control," he more clearly separates his wishes from his expectations: his life space differentiates into a "level of reality" and various "levels of irreality," such as fantasy and dream.

### Tenacity and Time Perspective

"Tenacity in the face of adversity is the most unequivocal index of high morale." This is an idea widely accepted as the essence of military morale. While there may be some question as to whether the ability to persist in the face of difficulties is actu-

ally the most fundamental aspect of morale, unquestionably it is one aspect of either civilian or military morale, and as such is a good starting point for discussion.

If morale means the ability to "take it," to face disagreeable or dangerous situations, one must ask first, "What constitute disagreeable or dangerous situations for an individual?" Ordinarily, we are accustomed to think of physical pain or bodily danger; yet anyone who climbs mountains or explores jungles for pleasure, any boy who drives an automobile fast, or who plays football shows that this answer is too simple.

(a) *The disagreeable and time perspective.* Under ordinary circumstances, an individual will strongly resist an order to pick up mercury from the floor with a wooden spoon, or to eat three dozen unsalted soda crackers. As "subjects" in an experiment, on the other hand, individuals were found ready to "take it" without either hesitation or resistance. In other words, whether or not an activity is disgraceful or unpleasant depends to a high degree on its psychological "meaning," that is, on the larger unit of events of which this action forms a part. In the role of a patient, for example, the individual permits as "treatment" by the doctor what would otherwise be vigorously resisted because of bodily pain or social unpleasantness.

A good example of the degree to which the meaning of the larger psychological units and the time perspective affect the felt pain and the morale of the individual is provided by M. L. Farber's study of suffering in prison. It was found that the prison work which the individual has to do day by day has no appreciable correlation with the amount of his suffering. Individuals who suffered much were quite as likely to hold advantageous jobs so far as power and leisure were concerned (such as editor of the prison magazine or runner for the deputy warden) as to hold the most disadvantageous or unpaid of prison jobs. (The correlation between the amount of suffering and the "objective" advantage of the prison job was .01.) There was little negative correlation between the subjective satisfaction which the prisoner felt in his prison job and the amount of his suffering ( $r = -.19$ ). A definite relation, on the other hand, did exist between the amount of suffering and certain factors connected with the future or past—a man's feeling, for instance, that his sentence was unjust ( $r = .57$ ), or his hope of "getting a break" in regard to release ( $r = -.39$ ). This relation held true, moreover, in spite of the fact that the release might be expected to take place only after a number of years. The *actual* length of the sentence and the length of the time served do not correlate strongly with the amount of suffering; however, a marked relationship does exist between the suffering and a man's *feeling* that he has served longer than he justly should have served ( $r = .66$ ).

Not present hardships in the usual sense of the term, then, but rather certain aspects of the psychological future and the psychological past, together with feelings of being treated fairly or unfairly, are most important in determining the amount of one's suffering. A factor of considerable weight for the amount of suffering in this case was uncertainty in regard to when parole might be granted ( $r = .51$ ). This factor, too, was one not related to the present immediate situation of the individual but was an aspect of his time perspective.

In solitary confinement, too, it has been frequently reported, one of the most painful experiences is the uncertainty as to how much time has elapsed. Once again, it is not a present hardship but certain characteristics of the time perspective which lend the situation its anguish.

(b) *Persistency and time perspective.* Even more than suffering, persistency depends on the time perspective of the individual. As long as there is hope that diffi-

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culties may be overcome for that price in effort and pain which the individual is ready to pay, he goes on trying. If the objective is worthy, indeed, the effort is not even felt to be a "sacrifice." Persistency, then, depends on two factors: the value of the goal and the outlook for the future. This holds both for child and adult, for soldier and civilian.

A few facts pertinent to morale, drawn from experiments with children, might be mentioned here. How soon the individual will give up in face of an obstacle depends, according to these experiments, on three factors: (1) the strength of the psychological force toward the goal (the persistency will be greater if the goal is more highly cherished or if the psychological distance to the goal is smaller); (2) the felt probability of reaching the goal (which, in turn, depends on past successes and failures and on the intellectual capacity of the individual); and (3) the degree of initiative of the individual.

The first point is identical with the felt value of the cause for which the effort is made. The second refers to the psychological future. The means whereby one can influence the psychological future so that a man's outlook will be optimistic is a point much discussed in regard to military morale. Everywhere the effect of the past on the future is emphasized; whereas nothing is more difficult than to keep up morale after a defeat, persistency is greatly strengthened by past victories. Nor need this past necessarily be one's own past. When the individual joins a "Fighting 69th," the tradition and history of this regiment become a part of his life-space. And only after he has demonstrated this fact will he be recognized as a true member.

Experimental data show that although past successes are most effective if they have been won in the same field of activity, nevertheless "substitute successes" and, to a lesser degree, mere praise and encouragement still bolster persistency. An individual may likewise be taught to be more persistent and to react less emotionally to obstacles if encouraging past experiences are built up. Persistency, indeed, is closely related to the social position of the individual, to his feeling of strength and security.

Passive individuals are on the average less persistent than active individuals; there are, however, certain exceptions. Individuals with low initiative sometimes show a kind of passive perseverance; they remain vis-à-vis the obstacle and keep up a gesturelike activity toward the goal. And some active individuals, on the other hand, quit very soon. Instead of waiting to be driven away slowly by an increasing number of failures, these individuals have sufficient initiative to make their decision as soon as realistic considerations indicate that the goal cannot be reached. The ability to make just such active decisions is recognized as one of the basic requirements for military leaders. A weak individual's gesturelike perseverance deprives him of the flexibility necessary for arriving at new, more efficient solutions. The readiness to make "realistic decisions" may sometimes, of course, be merely a front for a lack of willingness to see things through. We shall come back to this question later.

### Group Morale

Group morale depends on time perspective as much as does individual morale. Clearly demonstrative of this fact are French's controlled experiments with groups of individuals of college age who were placed in a physically disagreeable situation. The subjects were set to work in a room which slowly filled with smoke oozing in from under the door; and they knew that the doors were locked. After a while, the

smoke became rather disagreeable. The reactions of the group varied from panic to laughter, depending mainly upon whether the smoke was construed as arising from an actual fire or as a hoax of the psychologist. The difference between these interpretations lies mainly in a difference in time perspective and in the felt degree of reality of the danger. The recent history of morale in France, England, and the United States is a vivid example of how much the degree to which the reality of a danger is acknowledged determines group goals and group action.<sup>1</sup>

A comparative study made of previously organized and non-organized groups in a situation of fear and of frustration showed the organized groups to be both more highly motivated and more persistent. They were less likely to disintegrate, although as a result of this stronger motivation they felt more highly frustrated in regard to group goals which could not be reached. Contrary to usual expectation, however, fear spread more quickly through the organized than the unorganized group, because of the higher interdependence among the members of the former. In a highly specific way these experiments verify our everyday experience that the morale of an individual faced with danger is highly dependent on the atmosphere of his group.

### Initiative, Productivity, Goal Level, and Time Perspective

In Nazi Germany, morale is considered to be "a driving force which propels every unit of the political and military organization to exert maximum effort and capacity"; it "implies a positive state of mind of the individual and the mass toward a uniform goal." Such a concept of morale mirrors the training necessary for an offensive war and totalitarian uniformity. Experimental psychology indicates, however, that one element in this concept is correct for every type of morale. Tenacity in the face of obstacles, the ability to "take it on the chin," is merely one aspect of a more fundamental state of the person which may be characterized as a combination of initiative and a determination to reach certain goals, to realize certain values.

Given comparable settings, the morale of an individual or a group might be measured by the quality and quantity of its achievement, that is, by its productivity. Initiative and productivity, dependent as they are on the proper balance of a variety of factors, are highly sensitive to changes in this balance. Here physical well-being plays a significant role. Today, every country is aware of the importance of sufficient food and vitamins for civilian morale. An oversatiated individual, on the other hand, is by no means likely to show the greatest initiative and productivity. Subtle psychological factors play a great role in morale, and Hitler's plans of offensive warfare rightly consider the civilian morale of the enemy country as one of its most vulnerable and important points for attack.

### Productivity and a Time Perspective of Insecurity and Uncertainty

Experiments with children help us isolate some of the psychological factors determining initiative and productivity. For the situations of childhood are easily con-

<sup>1</sup>See the postscript to this chapter.

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trolled by the all-powerful adult, and children probably show more quickly than adults those basic reactions on which the psychology of large masses depends.

If the free play activity of a child is interfered with, his average level of productivity may regress, for instance, from the age level of five and a half years to the much lower level of productivity of the three-and-a-half-year-old child. This regression is closely related to the child's time perspective. Because the adult has stopped the child in the midst of play of great interest and productivity, now he feels himself to be on insecure ground; he is aware of the possibility that the overwhelming power of the adult may interfere again at any moment. This "background of insecurity and frustration" not only has a paralyzing effect on long-range planning; it also lowers initiative and the level of productivity.

The effect of interference is particularly severe if the individual is left in the dark as to the character of the new situation. The negative, nonspecific command, "Don't!" lowers initiative and productivity considerably more than a command to change to a different but specific task. Indeed, one of the main techniques for breaking morale through a "strategy of terror" consists in exactly this tactic—keep the person hazy as to where he stands and just what he may expect. If in addition frequent vacillations between severe disciplinary measures and promises of good treatment, together with the spreading of contradictory news, make the "cognitive structure" of the situation utterly unclear, then the individual may cease to know even whether a particular plan would lead toward or away from his goal. Under these conditions, even those individuals who have definite goals and are ready to take risks will be paralyzed by severe inner conflicts in regard to what to do.

Pairs of strong friends, it is interesting to note, regress less in a background of frustration than do pairs of children who are not friends. Their greater tolerance for frustration seems to be due to a feeling of greater security among friends, as indicated, for instance, by a greater readiness to attack the experimenter as the source of frustration. Here is an example of how group "belongingness" may increase a feeling of security, thereby raising the morale and the productivity of an individual.

The initiative of a child and his productivity have been found, moreover, to be greater in the co-operative play of pairs of children than in solitary play—both in situations of frustration and in situations of nonfrustration. The increased productivity of an individual as a member of a group as compared with his productivity as a lone individual is a factor of prime importance for civilian morale. Bearing out this point, a study of factory workers indicates that, aside from security, personal attention given to the individual plays a role in raising the level of productivity, probably because of the resultant increase in his feeling of "belongingness."

This finding is but one of many which pertain to age differences, individual differences, the effect of different situations, and the difference between the activity of individuals and groups—all of which indicate that productivity depends upon the number of diversified abilities and needs that can be integrated into an organized, unified endeavor. It is the principle of "diversity within unity" which dominates productivity, the principle that is so basic to a democratic solution of the problem of minorities and to democratic living in all types of groups, from small face-to-face groups to world organization.

In some cases, paradoxically, a certain amount of frustration or difficulty actually increases productivity; such seems to be the case if the individual previously has not been fully involved and if the difficulty serves as a fuse to touch off an all-

out effort. Closely related to this result is one of the most fundamental problems of morale, namely: where will the individual or the group set its goal? What will be its level of aspiration?

### Level of Aspiration and Time Perspective

The three-month-old infant is as happy when someone hands him a toy as when he gets it by his own efforts. But the child of two or three years frequently rejects the help of another person, preferring to get by his own action an object that is difficult to reach. He prefers, in other words, a difficult path and a difficult goal to an easy path and an easy goal. This behavior of human beings, seemingly paradoxical, is certainly contrary to a belief which is widely accepted and which deeply influences thinking, even about politics—the belief that human beings are led by the “pleasure principle” along the easiest road to the easiest goal. Actually, from childhood on, the goals which an individual sets in his daily life and for his long-range plans are influenced by his ideology, by the group to which he belongs, and by a tendency to raise his level of aspiration to the upper limit of his ability.

On this problem experiments have yielded considerable knowledge—how the level of aspiration develops during childhood, how success and failure in one field affect the level of aspiration in other fields, how the individual reacts to “too difficult” or “too easy” tasks, and how the standards of groups influence his own goal level.

The setting up of goals is closely related to time perspective. The goal of the individual includes his expectations for the future, his wishes, and his daydreams. Where the individual places his goals will be determined fundamentally by two factors, namely, by the individual's relations to certain values and by his sense of realism in regard to the probability of reaching the goal. The frames of reference which determine the values of success and failure vary considerably from individual to individual and from group to group. By and large, there is a tendency in our society to raise the level of aspiration toward the limit of the individual's ability. The principle of realism, on the other hand, tends to safeguard the individual against failure and to keep ambition down to earth. How high the individual can set his goal and still keep in touch with the reality level is one of the most important factors for his productivity and his morale.

A successful individual typically sets his next goal somewhat, but not too much, above his last achievement. In this way he steadily raises his level of aspiration. Although in the long run he is guided by his ideal goal, which may be rather high, nevertheless his real goal for the next step is kept realistically close to his present position. The unsuccessful individual, on the other hand, tends to show one of two reactions: he sets his goal very low, frequently below his past achievement—that is, he becomes intimidated and gives up reaching out toward higher goals—or he sets his goal far above his ability. This latter conduct is rather common. Sometimes the result is a gesturelike keeping up of high goals without serious striving; it may at other times mean that the individual is following blindly his ideal goal, losing sight of what in the present situation is possible. To develop and to maintain high goals and, at the same time, to keep the plan for the next action realistically within the limits of what is possible, seems to be one of the basic objectives for and a criterion of high morale.

How high is the group to which he belongs? Experimentally, it is found that, in general, the lower the level of aspiration, the higher the level of achievement. In other words, both the individual and the group tend to reach a level of aspiration which he belongs to. This is the level of individual goals and group goals to follow individual goals and group goals.

An experiment was conducted with 25 workers in a new plant in which they had just started work.<sup>2</sup> After a week (see Figure XIX.) When, nevertheless, they were given their performance goals, they were great, indeed, they were. Since the plant was new, the job at the start was stable. Inasmuch

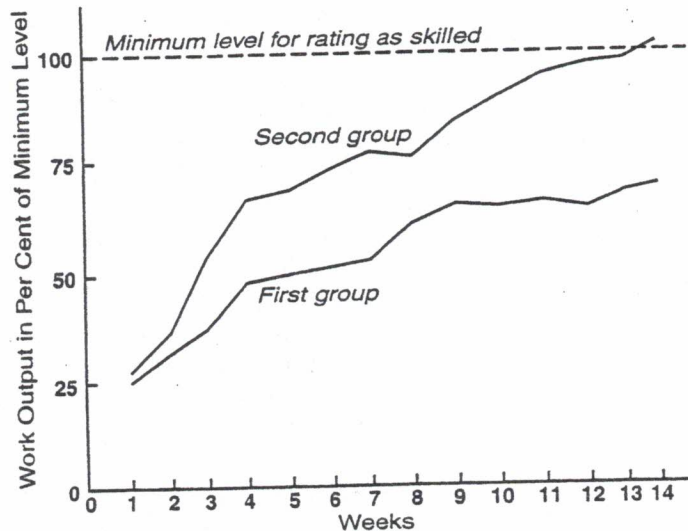
Work Output in Per Cent of Minimum Level

**Figure XIX.** The achievement of the workers are given in text.

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How high a person will set his goal is deeply affected by the standards of the group to which he belongs, as well as by the standards of groups below and above him. Experiments with college students prove that, if the standards of a group are low, an individual will slacken his efforts and set his goals far below those he could reach. He will, on the other hand, raise his goals if the group standards are raised. In other words, both the ideals and the action of an individual depend upon the group to which he belongs and upon the goals and expectations of that group. That the problem of individual morale is to a large extent a social-psychological problem of group goals and group standards is thus clear, even in those fields where the person seems to follow individual rather than group goals. Such a connection between individual and group morale is, of course, still closer in regard to the pursuit of group goals.

An experiment again clarifies the issue. Experiences with sewing-machine workers in a newly erected plant in a rural area of the South demonstrate the manner in which level of aspiration influences learning and achievement in factory work.<sup>2</sup> After a week's training, the output of the novices ranged from 20 per cent to 25 per cent of the quantity accepted as a standard for skilled operators. (See Fig. XIX.) When, nevertheless, the novices were informed that this standard was one which they ought to reach in ten to twelve weeks, the disparity between the level of their performance at the end of the first week and the stated goal was too great—so great, indeed, that the subjects invariably expressed skepticism of ever reaching it. Since the plant was newly organized, there were no skilled workers actually doing the job at the standard speed; hence the goal seemed to be "too difficult," unattainable. Inasmuch as the wage these novices earned was already greater than that to



**Figure XIX.** The effect of the level of aspiration and degree of reality of a goal on the achievement of factory workers. Each group contains forty workers. Details of experiment are given in text. (From a study by A. J. Marrow.)

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Alfred J. Marrow for making these data available.



which they were accustomed, there was nothing either outside or inside the plant to give the higher standards social reality for the group. As a result, the individuals were pleased with their progress in spite of the dissatisfaction of the supervisors; improvements were slow, learning plateaus common, and after fourteen weeks only 66 per cent of the standard had been reached.

For a second group of novices who started at the same level, a definite goal was set each week, to be reached at the end of that week, in addition to the information about the general standards. At that time, too, a large number of the older workers in the plant had achieved the standard. This combination of an immediate goal for the near future and the acceptance of the final goal as a real standard for the group led to a much more rapid improvement on the part of this group of novices. With but few learning plateaus, the average of the group had more than reached the goal standard at the end of the fourteenth week.

### Morale in the Pursuit of Group Goals and Time Perspective

Unfortunately there are few studies available which permit scientific conclusions about the relation between group morale and time perspective. A comparison of groups with democratic and autocratic structures, however, suggests certain conclusions. These groups, for example, showed very striking differences during periods when the leader left. Whereas the work morale of the democratic group was sustained at a high level, that of the autocratic group fell rapidly. In a short time, the latter group ceased entirely to produce. This difference may be traced to the relation between the individual and the group goals and to certain aspects of time perspective.

The organization of work, like any other aspect of the organization of the autocratic group, is based on the leader. It is he who determines the policy of the group; it is he who sets the specific goals of action for the members within the group. That means that the goals of the individual as well as his action as a group member are "induced" by the leader. It is the leader's power-field which keeps the individual going, which determines his work morale, and which makes the group an organized unit. In the democratic group, on the contrary, every member has had a hand in determining the policy of the group; every member has helped to lay out the plans. As a result, each is more "we-centered" and less "ego-centered" than the member of the autocratic group. Because the group goes ahead under its own steam, its work morale does not flag as soon as the power-field of the leader is eliminated.

"Acceptance" of the group goals by the member of the autocratic group means giving in to a superior power and subordinating one's own will. In the democratic group, "acceptance" of the group goal by the member means taking it over and making it one's own goal. The readiness to do so, in the latter case, is partly based on the time perspective of the individual; in the past, that is, he himself has participated in setting up that goal and now he feels his individual responsibility in carrying it through. Not less essential is the difference in time perspective of the members of both groups in regard to planning the future. For the distant future, to be sure, the autocratic leader frequently reveals to his subjects some high, ideal goal. But when it comes to immediate action, it is one of the accepted means of the autocratic leader to reveal to his followers not more than the immediate next step of his actual plans. In this way not only is he able to keep the future of the members in his own hands;

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in addition he makes the members dependent on him, and he can direct them from moment to moment in whatever direction he wishes.

The member of a democratic group who himself has helped to lay out the long-range plan has a rather different time perspective. In a much clearer situation, he is able to take not only the next step but also the following step quite independently. Because he knows his position and action within the larger group plan, he can modify his own action with the changing situation.

In contrast to both democratic and autocratic groups, the *laissez faire* group, where the leader keeps hands off, shows only sporadic flare-ups of group planning or of long-range individual projects. The work morale of such a group is very low compared with either that of the democratic or the autocratic group—an indication of the importance of definite goals for group morale. Not those goals which can be reached easily but a psychological future with obstacles and high goals is conducive to high morale.

Certain groups in the work camps for conscientious objectors, who as a rule pay for their own upkeep, are frequently permitted to plan by themselves how to reach the work objectives set for them. If reports are correct, these groups, with their self-planned organization, produce many times as much as groups under ordinary methods of supervision. One factor behind this achievement seems to be a long-range time perspective combined with the definiteness of their goal: the conscientious objectors attempt to train for the difficult task of reconstruction in Europe after the war.

### Leadership, Morale, and Time Perspective

In an experiment by Bavelas investigating problems of training leaders, the importance of time perspective is apparent, both for the morale of the leaders themselves and for the effect of the leaders in turn on the group morale. The striking change in the morale of the leaders from "low morale" before training to "high morale" after three weeks of training is related to the fact that the goals of these individuals changed from a day-to-day attempt to keep their insecure W.P.A. jobs to a broader—and actually more difficult—less personal goal of giving children the benefit of experiencing genuine democratic group life. Such a change in goal level and time perspective was brought about partly by the experience of membership in a democratic training group which had itself set definite goals and laid out its plans, and partly by the experience of leaving a depressive, narrow, and meaningless past for a future which, with all its uncertainty, contained a goal worth striving toward.

A positive time perspective, a time perspective guided by worth-while goals, is one of the basic elements of high morale. At the same time, the process is reciprocal; high morale itself creates long-range time perspective and sets up worth-while goals. At the end of the training process, the leaders mentioned above had set for themselves goals far above those of which previously they would have dared dream. We are dealing here with one of these circular types of dependencies which are frequently found in social psychology. The highly intelligent person, for example, is better able than the feeble-minded person to create situations which will be easy to handle. As a result, the feeble-minded, with his low ability, frequently finds himself in more difficult situations than the normal. Similarly, the socially maladjusted person creates more difficult social situations for himself than does the well-adjusted

person and, doing badly in the difficult situation, easily goes from bad to worse. Again, poor morale makes for a poor time perspective, which in turn results in still poorer morale; whereas high morale sets not only high goals but is likely to create situations of progress conducive to still better morale.

This circular process can be observed also in regard to the morale of the group as a whole. The interdependence among the members of a group, in fact, makes the circularity of the processes even more unmistakable. In one experiment, for instance, a group of children, having been together for one hour in a democratic group, spontaneously demanded the continuation of that group. When informed of the lack of an adult leader, they organized themselves. Their morale, in other words, was high enough to broaden their time perspective; they set themselves a group goal extending over weeks—and later included a half-year project.

### Realism, Morale, and Time Perspective

One aspect of time perspective which is essential for morale is realism. Here again we encounter the same paradox as that underlying productivity: one criterion of morale is the height of the goal level which the individual is ready to accept seriously. For high morale, the objective to be reached will represent a great step forward from the present state of affairs. The "realistic" politician who always keeps both feet on the ground and his hand in the pork barrel is a symbol of low morale. On the other hand, the "idealistic" individual who has high ideals without making serious efforts to attain them can likewise make few claims to being a person of high morale. Morale demands both a goal sufficiently above the present state of affairs, and an effort to reach the distant goal through actions planned with sufficient realism to promise an actual step forward. One might say that this paradox—to be realistic, and at the same time be guided by high goals—lies at the heart of the problem of morale, at least as far as time perspective is concerned.

### Too Immediate and Too Distant Goals

What an immediate or a far distant goal means for realism and morale and how it is related to the time perspective of the individual or of a group might best be illustrated by certain aspects of development. The normal healthy child in the elementary school lives in groups of children whose standards and values, whose ideologies and goals, will be of utmost importance for his own goals and his own conduct. If he is fortunate enough to be born in the United States, there will be a good chance that his school group will have a sufficiently democratic atmosphere to give him a clear, first-hand experience in what it means to be a leader as well as a follower in a democratic group, what it means to "play fair," to recognize differences of opinion and differences of ability without intolerance or bossiness and equally, too, without softness or lack of backbone. Only a few children will have experienced anything approaching a perfect democracy; still, they will have experienced frequently a group atmosphere which approaches democracy sufficiently to give them a better taste of democratic procedures than the vast majority of the citizens of European countries are likely ever to have experienced.

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Experiments indicate that children at eight years are more altruistic than adults, and that children at ten years are strongly guided by an ideology of fairness. In short, the conduct of the average child at that age follows relatively closely the standards and values of the groups to which he belongs; but these groups are the face-to-face groups of his school, his family, his gang. The period of time to which these standards and goals are related in a realistic manner is a matter of weeks, months, or at most of a few years. The scope of time and space in which national politics takes place in the social world of the adult is, for the young child, something too large and too overpowering to be considered by him in any but a highly abstract or naïve manner.

Growing through adolescence to young manhood or womanhood means enlarging the scope and the time perspective of one's psychological world. In a measure, it means also leaving the small face-to-face groups, such as the family, or else assigning these small groups a secondary place in a larger social world with which the young person now seriously has to come into grips. It is the eternal right of every young generation to consider critically the standards and values of this larger world of the older generation. The better and the more democratic the education during childhood has been, the more serious and the more honest will these critical considerations be.

For the young person growing into problems of such magnitude—in fact, for anybody facing for the first time problems of a new order of magnitude—two reactions are typical. The individual may, in the first place, shrink from making decisions of such importance, trying rather to restrict himself to the smaller time perspective which he was just outgrowing. His low morale will then lead him to place his main emphasis on the small day-to-day goals. An example is the college girl who, because she is so disgusted with the war “over there in Europe,” will not even look at the newspapers or listen to the radio.<sup>3</sup>

At the other extreme is the individual who refuses to think in a time perspective of less than a thousand years. He thinks in terms of “what ought to be”; his goals as such are frequently excellent, and he refuses to take any action which might run counter to his principles. In so far as his goals are characterized by a high discrepancy between “what is” and “what should be,” between the wish level for the future and the present reality level, his time perspective is opposite to that of an individual who is satisfied with the status quo. But the very weight which the distant goal has for the individual who takes it seriously, the very fact that he is dissatisfied with the present situation, make it difficult for him to give sufficient consideration to the actual structure of the present situation, or to conceive realistically what step in the present world can be taken to achieve this end. For one growing into problems which deal with a new scope of time perspective, it is difficult, at first, to distinguish between the cynic, who is ready to use any means to his ends, and the person of high morale, who takes his goal seriously enough to do what is necessary to change the present state of affairs.

### Two Foundations of Action

The conviction that a certain action will lead toward the direction in which the individual wants to go and not in just the opposite direction is based partly on what is

<sup>3</sup>See postscript to this chapter.

called technical knowledge. But for the individual this knowledge is limited; his actions are always based, in part, on some type of "belief." There are many types of such beliefs on which the principle of realism within morale can be based. We shall mention but two.

The exigencies of modern warfare have compelled the armies to give a fair measure of independence to the individual private. In some respects, the army of Nazi Germany can be said to have more status-democracy between officers and men than had previously existed in the army of the Kaiser. On the whole, however, and particularly in regard to civilian life and to civilian education, Hitler has placed the relation between leader and led on a basis of blind obedience to a degree unheard of in modern life outside of certain monasteries. Ever since Hitler came to power, the nursery school teacher, for example, has been instructed never to explain an order to a child, even if he could understand the reason, because the child should learn to obey blindly. "There are many things which can be forgiven, no matter how evil they may be. But disloyalty to the Fuehrer can never be pardoned."

The belief that one's action goes in the correct direction is, in such an atmosphere, based primarily if not exclusively on the trust in the leader. The area in which independent thinking is permitted is small, more or less limited to the execution of the immediate next step as objective. Blind obedience means abandoning, in all essential areas, that measure of reasoning and independent judgment which prevailed in Germany before Hitler's rise to power and which, to a much greater extent, has been one of the traditional rights of the citizen in the United States.

It is not chance that the fight against reason and the replacement of reason by sentiment has been one of the unending symptoms of politically reactionary movements throughout the centuries. To recognize reason socially means that a sound argument "counts," no matter who brings it forth; it means recognizing the basic equality of men. In an autocracy, only the leader needs to be correctly informed; in a democracy, popular determination of policy can work only if the people who participate in goal-setting are realistically aware of the actual situation. In other words, the emphasis on truth, the readiness to let the people know about difficult situations and failures, does not spring merely from an abstract "love of truth" but is rather a political necessity. Here lies one of the points on which democratic morale can, in the long run, be superior to authoritarian morale. A far more stable ground for morale than the belief in the ability of any leader individually is truth itself.

### Postscript

This chapter was written before December 7, 1941; now we are at war. The effect on the morale of the country has been immediate and striking—a circumstance which bears out some of the points we have discussed.

The attack on Hawaii has shown that Japan represents a much more serious danger than many had thought. But this feeling of increased and close danger has heightened rather than depressed morale, being as it is in line with the general finding that morale changes, not parallel with, but rather, inversely to the amount of difficulty, so long as certain goals are maintained.

The experience of attack upon our own country has overnight brought war down from the cloudy realms of possibility to the level of reality. Although the college girl

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whom we mentioned above may still be far from realizing fully what it means to be at war, nonetheless war is no longer something "over there in Europe." It is here. Thus as a result of our being in the war, the will to win has become a clear and unquestioned objective.

Before December 7, what was a realistic outlook for one individual was doubted by a second and ridiculed as impossible by a third. Now the situation has been clarified. Countless conflicts, whether among factions in the population or within each individual himself, have ceased now that the major aspects of the time perspectives are definitely set.

Being within this new and definite situation means that certain basic goals and necessary actions are "given." In such a situation no special effort is required to keep morale high. The very combination of a definite objective, the belief in final success, and the realistic facing of great difficulties is high morale. The individual who makes extreme efforts and accepts great risks for worth-while goals does not feel that he is making a sacrifice; instead, he merely feels that he is acting naturally.

When a major decision has been made, it frequently happens that the individual or the group will show high morale in the new situation because of a sudden clear awareness of the objectives of the enterprise as a whole. As the effort proceeds, however, a variety of detailed problems and difficulties is bound to arise and to occupy a more prominent position. There is danger that groups which started out with enthusiasm may yet lose their "punch" when the clearness of the situation at the time of decision has been clouded by such a multitude of details, problems, and immediate difficulties. Group morale during a prolonged effort depends much on the degree to which the members keep clearly in view the total task and the final objective.

In the months and years to come, then, civilian morale can be expected to depend much upon the clarity and the value of our war goals, and upon the degree to which such values come to be deeply rooted within each individual.