



Humanity's Madness: Consequences of Becoming Literate

Louis S. Berger

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Humanity's Madness: Consequences of Becoming Literate is the last in a trilogy that includes Averting Global Extinction (Jason Aronson, 2009) and Language and the Ineffable (Lexington Books, 2011). This accessible but highly unconventional book extends and integrates decades of the author's published and unpublished precursor work on language and sociocultural pathology. Its principal thesis is that humankind's many current and past predicaments, both large and small, are symptoms of a special kind of madness – the madness that became possible, although not necessarily inevitable, about 6000 years ago when humanity began to become literate, explicitly dualistic, and enabled to dominate nature. This at first glance unlikely, counterintuitive hypothesis is based partly on a major reconceptualization and radicalization of older work by linguists and anthropologists on so-called primary orality, the human condition that preceded the development of literacy, and partly on the author's previous work: unorthodox conceptions of the earliest eras of individual human development (ontogenesis) and of nontraditional views about the nature of language; on psychodynamically-informed approaches to dealing with a culture's defensive resistance to change; on reinterpretations of the findings of anthropological, linguistic and psychological studies of the Pirahãs, a small, highly atypical Amazon tribe. Thus, this book draws on a very broad, rich spectrum of works from various disciplines by the author and others. The result in this work is an original perspective from which humanity's many current and past problems can be seen as various tokens of a millennia-old madness whose symptoms and manifestations have changed and evolved as our ability to dominate and exploit nature escalated, but the roots remain the same. From that clinical-historical-philosophical-linguistic perspective on problems, the current looming threats to global survival are but the latest in a very long line of increasingly severe manifestations of an underlying pathology, as are many apparently lesser, or even unrecognized, difficulties that trouble academic disciplines, professions and ordinary, everyday living. This novel reconceptualization of numerous old and new difficulties and paradoxes also points to a heretofore overlooked promising approach suggested by an ontogenetic perspective: based on the Piraha studies, Humanity's Madness proposes that fundamentally reconceptualizing and altering a culture's child-raising practices may provide a promising (though difficult, unpalatable) way of ameliorating current dilemmas. In sum, Humanity's Madness offers an accessible, clear, generative and original starting point for thinking about and working toward promising alternative solutions to the many different kinds of daunting contemporary predicaments.

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