Scarcity, Genocide, and the Postmodern Individual

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If Walliman and Dobkowski's thesis (chapter 1) is nearly correct, and future scarcities create a global condition characterized by increasing conflict and "a great potential for mass death and even genocide," how are people likely to react? More specifically, what sort of psychosocial and behavioral responses may be anticipated from persons who have grown up in a postmodern cultural/technological environment? That is, the high-tech, media-saturated environment already well established in North America and Western Europe and beginning to emerge in urban centers throughout much of the rest of the world with the penetration of MTV, McDonald's, the Internet, Disney Worlds, and so on. To examine this question, this chapter is organized in three sections dealing first with the various forms of genocidal events that seem probable in future conditions of scarcity, second with the general issue of postmodern culture and personality—those personality attributes many social scientists and culture critics already perceive to be characteristic of youth in postmodern environments—and third with the potential reactions of such postmodern individuals to genocidal events.

Scarcity and Genocidal Events

In an article titled "The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social
Fabric of Our Planet,” journalist Robert Kaplan (1994) provides a remarkably powerful, documented argument directly supportive of Walliman’s thesis on scarcity. Kaplan suggests that facing increasing scarcity, a condition he has observed in West Africa and Eastern Europe, systematic campaigns of rationalized mass killing as exemplified by the Holocaust or the Cambodian genocide are very unlikely because they require dedicated cadres under the command of a strong central government. Scarcity, however, tends to erode the power of central governing authorities. Lacking the material resources to implement or impose their policies in an orderly fashion, governments become ineffective, corrupt, and decay toward anarchic tribalism. Yet, if this situation precludes massive genocide programs, it makes a broad range of smaller-scale genocidal events not only more likely but also, according to Kaplan, virtually inevitable.

It takes no great leap of the imagination to understand the connection between scarcity and a convergent manifold of deadly events that can ultimately (and almost as quickly) kill as many people as perished in Auschwitz. Over the past decade, for example, famines brought on by warfare or natural disasters or both have killed millions in Ethiopia, Somalia, and other parts of Africa. Besides the continuing political instability and ethnic conflicts, soil erosion, water shortages, and overpopulation are all predicted to make famines more frequent in the future. Moreover, the international relief efforts that have mitigated famines in the past appear destined to decline as the resources available for relief, as well as the will to provide it, become reduced under conditions of global scarcity.

A similar dynamic applies to outbreaks of epidemic diseases. Scarcity already limits what is being done to control AIDS in the poorer countries and in the poorer segments of the richer countries. As the AIDS epidemic spreads, and as new and relatively untreatable diseases emerge (for example, the Ebola virus, cerebral malaria, variations of tuberculosis), the demand for biomedical relief will be increasing at the same time as the resources available to provide it will be decreasing.

Another domain of genocidal events is war. Appealing to Martin van Creveld’s analysis of post-cold war warfare, Kaplan points out that as scarcity undermines the authority of central governments, organized warfare conducted by national armies is being replaced by varieties of tribal, ethnic, and religious wars. Recent and current examples include the struggles in the former Yugoslavia, the Russo-
Chechin war, the tribal war in Rwanda, and lesser conflicts or rebellions in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Peru, and Northern Ireland. Kaplan further notes that scarcity makes participation in such forms of warfare an attractive alternative for many young men: “As anybody who has had experience with Chetniks in Serbia, ‘technicals’ in Somalia, Tontons Macoutes in Haiti, or soldiers in Sierra Leone can tell you, in places where the Western Enlightenment has not penetrated and where there has always been mass poverty, people find liberation in violence” (1994, 72).

This point clearly applies equally well to the growth of urban gang violence in the United States and the attractiveness of guns for youth in general, not to mention the middle-aged wearing camouflage and playing with guns on weekends. It is also suggested that low-intensity armed conflicts shade directly into terrorism and the illegal traffic in weapons and drugs. The Afghan tribal armies, for example, substantially support themselves by exporting opium; the Shining Path guerrillas in Peru receive support from cocaine producers, and U.S. motorcycle gangs transport drugs. In this connection, it deserves emphasis that powerful nations such as the United States are not immune to the domestic violence associated with scarcity. The social dislocations produced as the United States makes a transition toward a postindustrial economy appears directly or indirectly linked to the rise of armed religious cults, private militias, and gang violence. If the death toll thus far from gangs, cults, suicidal paranoids, or terrorist bombers is still relatively small, it may well show a dramatic increase under the impact of serious scarcity.

Finally, no discussion of the potential genocidal events associated with scarcity would be complete without mention of the terrorist or rogue nation-state nuclear-weapon scenario. The theme is that the political and economic pressures created by scarcity will increase the likelihood that nuclear weapons or the means to produce them will be offered for sale to any high bidder. And the same sorts of pressures are likely to make terrorists or rogue nations more anxious to acquire, and eventually use, such weapons.

Postmodern Culture and Personality

Although detailed discussion of the end of the modern and beginning of the postmodern era is beyond the scope of this chapter, some brief perspectives on the issue may be cited. Rappoport and Kren (1995)
argue that the modernity ideal died at Auschwitz and Hiroshima. That is, the underlying assumption of modernity, that human progress toward a better world could be achieved through increased rationality, technological efficiency, and social control, has been, on the evidence of the Nazi death camps and the nuclear bombing of Japan, shown to be false. Nothing in modern science, law, or religion forestalled or seriously mitigated the mass genocides of this century.

Another perspective on the end of modernity was suggested by the architecture critic Charles Jencks (1978). He claims that modernity lost its credibility when the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis was demolished in 1972. Designed according to the rationally efficient, functional criteria of modernity, this low-income housing complex was finally seen to be unfit for human habitation.

A broader historical view relevant to the end of modernity can be found in a recent review of Hobsbawm’s history of the twentieth century: “In short, Eric Hobsbawm’s history of the twentieth century is the story of the decline of a civilization, the history of a world which has both brought to full flowering the material and cultural potential of the nineteenth century and betrayed its promise” (Judt 1995, 20).

One way to epitomize the postmodern era as opposed to the modern is by appeal to a series of antinomies between them. Marshak (1995), for example, lists the following as intrinsic to modernity: gunpowder, the printing press, mechanical clocks, national markets, sequential technologies, and independent relationships. Intrinsic to postmodernity are: atomic weapons, television, electronic clocks, global markets, simultaneous technologies, and interdependent relationships. He further contrasts modern management with postmodern management principles as follows: stable versus flexible operations, structured channels versus fluid flows, hindsight versus foresight, and hierarchies versus networks.

Comparative lists of this sort are oversimplifications postulating dichotomies where there are often underlying continuities, but they provide a useful sense of the quantum leap many commentators perceive to be characteristic of the movement beyond modernity. This view can be seen clearly in Stanley’s (1993) economics-oriented description of the “principles underlying postmodernization,” which include “the appeal to unadorned market relations, the erosion of the state as a source of dependence, the weakening of workplace solidarities and the elevation of the private over the public in matters of cultural and social provision” (30).
Kvale (1992, 2) provides a broader philosophical and cultural statement.

Postmodernity refers to an age which has lost the Enlightenment belief in emancipation and progress through more knowledge and scientific research. Postmodern society consists less of totalities to be ruled by preconceived models than by decentralization to heterogeneous local contexts characterized by flexibility and change. There is a change from a mechanical . . . to an information industry, and from production to consumption as the main focus of the economy. It is an age in which the multiple perspectives of new media tend to dissolve any sharp line between reality and fantasy.

He also notes as definitive of postmodern culture: art as collage, Las Vegas architecture, rock videos, and the novels of Umberto Ecco. I would add certain films, such as Bagdad Cafe and Pulp Fiction.

Films and television have an important status in postmodern culture because they allow persons to evade domination by established, prosaic realities and encourage awareness of alternative, possible worlds. It has been suggested, moreover, that in some respects postmodern electronic technologies have advanced to where their simulations/representations can become, if not an independent reality, at least a criterion of the given reality. “Thus, signs may attain the same status as the objects they signify in societies that are increasingly immersed in media imagery, and the categorization of persons, objects or events will vary not with their intrinsic properties but with the sign qualities these properties evoke when presented in the media” (Baumgardner and Rappoport 1995, 14).

Given the truism among social scientists that personality is grounded upon, and reflective of, culture, whereas culture is understood to be an expression of the “collective personality” of society, it is not surprising that over the past decade an increasing number of personality theorists (for example, Lifton 1993; Gergen 1991; Cushman 1990; Secord 1990; Rowan 1990; Sampson 1989; Baumeister 1987) have begun to discuss the psychosocial significance of the socioeconomic and cultural changes noted above under the heading of postmodernism. Most of this burgeoning literature follows the culture-personality logic laid out by Geertz (1973), namely, that culture is the ultimate source of the individual’s core sense of self or identity, because it provides the systems of meaning—roles, norms, values, and language—through
which individuals conduct their lives and sense of self. (Parenthetically, although the terms self-concept or self-image refer to both self as object and subject, while identity is usually described as the core structure of self as subject, no such fine distinctions are made in the following text.) Writing in more concrete terms, Berger, Berger, and Kellner (1974, 12) stipulate that “the consciousness of everyday life is the web of meanings that allow the individual to navigate his way through the ordinary events and encounters of his life with others.” It is also considered axiomatic that major changes in a culture will be accompanied by major changes in the self-concepts of its inhabitants. Frequently cited as exemplary are the changing self-concepts of women in American society.

How do such changes come about? What are the mechanisms of identity formation or change or both? In premodern and early modern societies, this was not considered problematic. The individual’s self-concept or identity was seen to be largely determined by the cultural meanings attached to their gender, status in the family (first or later born), and the position of the family in society (as often indicated by the family name: Baker, Smith, Hunter, Taylor, and so on). In modern industrial societies, and even moreso in postindustrial, that is, postmodern societies, however, identity and the self have become profoundly problematic because the family-based and societal mechanisms no longer apply.

Some of the reasons for this are obvious. At the level of the family, it is simply that stable intact families able to transmit a strong sense of independent selfhood to their children are becoming the exception rather than the rule. Even where such families exist, they can hardly succeed in this task, because the culture meanings carried by, and embodied in, parents and elders are often irrelevant to the situations challenging young people in the postmodern environment. It is no mere irony that America today resounds with discourses on the “family values” that have become yet another kind of scarce resource.

At the level of society, identity has become more and more problematic because structural and process changes now occur so rapidly as to offer only an amorphous, constantly shifting basis for identity formation. One need only mention here the gender role changes (for example, women become astronauts and drive trucks; men become nurses and grade-school teachers), the corporate takeovers, downsizing of the white- and blue-collar labor force, and relocations of industries that have become commonplace.
More significantly, however, at the level of popular culture, the formation of personal identity and construction of a firm self-concept has for many youths gone beyond the problematic and, like the manual typewriter or rotary telephone, taken on the quality of a curious historical artifact. Thus, as may be seen on MTV, the models of personality popular among young people emphasize flexibility, diversity, and multiple identities. For example, a music video by Madonna was reportedly criticized by a middle-aged columnist for being "chaotic" because of her changing personas: seductress, naive innocent, aggressive dominator. But the same report quoted one of her young fans as saying it was wonderful because "Madonna is always herself."

The ideal of a variable, multidimensional rather than unitary self was also modeled in the recent television series Quantum Leap. The series centered on a protagonist who took over the minds and bodies of people to rescue them from difficult situations. Similarly, in the series Highway to Heaven, the lead characters were angels who created novel identities for themselves as they went about aiding people in distress. The underlying attraction of these and other popular culture models of a pluralistic self or diversified personal identity is their representation of exciting transformational possibilities. On the one hand, they dramatize the rich potentials that may emerge when the social construction of reality principle is applied to personality development, and on the other, they present a glamorous alternative to the mundane effort required to build a single, unitary identity. In sum, for young people in the postmodern environment of rapid socioeconomic changes and a 50 percent divorce rate, the modern ideal of a unitary identity based on singular loyalties to a specific career and intimate psychosexual relationship—the classic foundations of integrated identity postulated by Erik Erikson (1950)—may simply appear to be a bygone romantic myth.

Besides the popular culture models encouraging a pluralistic self-concept, human potential psychologists also contribute to this trend by warning against entrapment in a fixed sense of self that can inhibit further personal growth. A number of self-transformational therapies are available to save people from such a situation. Moreover, by taking advantage of readily available body-work facilities and cosmetic surgery, the body itself may be harnessed to the task of self-transformation (see Finkelstein 1991 for a detailed treatment of the body issue).

Some therapists consider that cultural pressures toward pluralistic self-concepts signal a dangerous slide into psychopathology. The current American Psychiatric Association diagnostic manual (DSM-111)
defines as an identity "disorder" the "inability to integrate aspects of the self." And a recent survey reported a significant rise in the number of persons diagnosed with such disorders (Ross 1991). However, some clinical theorists do not see any danger here. DeBerry (1993) suggests that a "schizoid consciousness" is adaptive to contemporary life conditions, and Rowan (1990) considers that "subpersonalities" are a normal "semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality."

Empirical support for the more-positive viewpoint is growing. Markus and Nurius (1986) described evidence showing that normal college students represent their various developmental possibilities as a range of different "possible selves." These authors concluded that it is a mistake to believe in a single self "to which one can be true." Linville (1985, 1987) found that persons with complex or pluralistic self-concepts could better cope with stress, the premise being that if a failure or loss of self-esteem occurs in one self-domain, it can be offset by success in another. A current study, moreover, indicates that persons with high scores on a measure of personality multiplicity show higher levels of creativity than others (Boone 1995).

Theoretical discussions of postmodern personality qualities are more variable. Lifton (1993) acknowledges the multiplicity imposed by postmodern culture while suggesting that an "integrative proteanism" can hold disparate aspects of the self loosely together. Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992), however, argue that personality should be understood as centering on a "dialogical self" in which the "I" may fluctuate through various positions and thus facilitate dialogical relations between those positions. Gergen (1991) characterizes the postmodern self as being "saturated," that is, overstimulated and thus fragmented by exposure to the plethora of postmodern communication technologies. He suggests that this condition may eventually yield persons with a new and beneficial "global consciousness."

In sharp contrast to Gergen's saturated self, Cushman (1990) postulates an "empty self" brought about by the fragmentation and absence of stable values in postmodern society. He maintains that postmodern individuals have become relentless consumers who smother their interior emptiness with material goods. Writing on the theme of "how the self became a problem," Baumeister (1987) sees contemporary individuals caught in a double bind, on the one hand having to define their life meanings and purposes for themselves, yet on the other still being bound up in society. In this situation, many come to define themselves by how others see them; hence their concern with style statements and con-
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sumption. Finally, Sampson (1985) attributes the problems of contempo-
rary selfhood to the obsolescence of the American ideal of “self-contained
individualism.” In the emerging globally linked world system, the
postmodern individual can no longer find much meaning in assertive
independence, but must find it through relationships and integration
with a larger community. Sampson conceives the postmodern self to be
“a decentralized, nonequilibrium structure, a pantheon of selves, within
a single body.” A similar view has been adopted by Fiske and Taylor
(1991), who describe the self as “an unordered, non-hierarchical collec-
tion of features.”

As might be expected when any fundamental culture change rel-
evant to the theoretical focus of a field or discipline sets in, interpreta-
tions of its meaning will vary a good deal; this has certainly been the
case insofar as postmodern culture and personality are concerned. But
underlying the diverse formulations of theorists, therapists, and research-
ers is a generally agreed-upon conclusion that as compared with
moderns, postmodern individuals tend to have multiple self-concepts,
or multifaceted identities or both. Taken together, the burden of evi-
dence emerging from analyses of popular culture as well as empirical
research and theoretical discourse clearly points to multiplicity as the
defining quality of postmodern personality. Particularly noteworthy are
the apparent parallels between the features of postmodern culture—
collage, networks, fluidity, decentralization—and the personality quali-
ties suggested as characteristic of postmodern individuals—schizoid
consciousness, subpersonalities, possible selves, dialogical self, saturated
self, and empty self.

It also seems clear that the hierarchical structure of personality
idealized in modern psychology, that is, a vertically integrated, cen-
trally organized system in which lower-order impulses and emotions
are supposed to be controlled by higher-order cognitive (ego) pro-
cesses, is no longer viable. It appears destined to be replaced by a
horizontally integrated, decentralized system—one in which the cog-
nitive and emotional sides are seen as interpenetrating rather than
opposed, and the model for consciousness becomes a conversation of
equals rather than a struggle for power.

Viewed in this perspective, the modern idea that personal moral-
ity can be understood as residing in a unitary “superego” or con-
science that wrestles with our basic instincts while trying to enforce
obedience to internalized moral values seems not only irrelevant but
also reminiscent of a Victorian steam engine. A postmodern approach,
by contrast, would conceptualize personal morality as a manifold of context-dependent evaluative possibilities. In a valuable comprehensive review of postmodern morality, Hill (1995, 7) concludes: “Instead of moral universals, the postmodern self acknowledges the multiplicity of moral choices and seeks to understand morality in terms of our relations to others and community.” It is further suggested that this is a highly relativistic and relational type of morality that transcends rationality. The postmodern culture recognizes a plurality of rationalities, and for any given situation it may offer such a broad range of possible values and actions as to reduce the exercise of moral choice to an arbitrary act of will—a “leap of faith.”

**Postmodern’s Reactions to Genocidal Events**

To explore the question of how postmoderns may respond to genocidal events, it will be helpful to first mention a few general disclaimers—theoretical “points of order.” Thus, if one wished to address the question in a genuinely postmodern voice, there would be an immediate appeal to the principles of contextualism and the social construction of meaning. One would question the question: where is it coming from, who is asking it, what sort of genocidal events are concerned, and what is the range of meanings that might plausibly be attributed to these events? In short, one might easily fall into an endless discursive textual analysis postmodern thinkers call deconstruction, and the likely bottom line would simply be “it all depends.”

It should also be stipulated that, like moderns, postmoderns come in different varieties. Ambiguous as traditional socioeconomic and class distinctions may be, for example, they are, nevertheless, still applicable to postmoderns. Indeed, at least metaphorically, the contemporary two-class society distinction fits quite well. There are the postmodern proletarians who service and maintain the information highway versus the plutocrats who cruise on it. And there appear to be “lumpen” postmoderns—homeless surfers of cyberspace forever seeking a new electronic fix versus the avant-garde of artists and professionals pushing the limits of global linkage.

But though the significance of the foregoing considerations must be acknowledged as undoubtedly useful in various contexts, they will be set aside here in favor of a more conventional type of comparative analysis: how do the salient features of postmodern culture and personality relate to knowledge about individual responses to genocidal events?
In their analysis of "the genocidal mentality" Lifton and Markusen (1990) provide a detailed discussion of the psychosocial adjustment they found to be characteristic of persons able to accept and participate in genocidal activities. Called "doubling," the process involves a type of psychic splitting analogous to the Freudian ego defense mechanism of compartmentalization. Doubling, however, is defined as a form of dissociation by which the individual's self is divided into "two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self" (Lifton and Markusen, 106). This phenomenon was identified by Lifton (1986) as a particularly strong personality factor enabling Nazi physicians to carry out their work in the death camps. A less intense but very similar type of doubling was also found by Lifton and Markusen to be typical of American nuclear-warfare planners and atomic-weapons scientists.

Insofar as doubling is a valid formulation of the way persons can accommodate themselves to genocidal events, and insofar as doubling would seem to be a specific variant of the general multiplicity (if not "schizoid consciousness") typical of postmoderns, it follows that postmoderns would probably not find it very difficult to tolerate genocidal events. They are, from this standpoint, already geared up to carry out the appropriate psychosocial adjustment.

Language and imagery are another source of the genocidal mentality. Lifton and Markusen refer to a "language of nonfeeling," noting that nuclear strategists very frequently speak in a language of euphemisms, acronyms, and metaphors, which allow them to distance themselves or dissociate from the realities of human destruction intrinsic to their work. Here too, there is a direct parallel with the semiotics of postmodern culture, in that much of contemporary language and imagery is manifestly "nonfeeling." One need only consider the rapid collage imagery, metaphors, and language of music videos and video games, computer screen icons, passwords, PIN numbers, and the trivialization of violence on television.

Immersion in such a semiotic environment may not produce full-blown dissociation but can hardly fail to facilitate a degree of nonfeeling or desensitization toward genocidal events. And this process would seem particularly relevant to situations in which victims lack the sign qualities that can evoke empathy among "viewers." In a rudimentary form, perhaps such desensitization is already apparent from the way postmoderns can navigate through the homeless people cluttering urban centers, either treating them as invisible or dropping a handout without breaking stride.
The empathy issue deserves further emphasis, because it is generally viewed as the key psychological factor determining individual behavior in problematic social situations, and has, accordingly, been heavily researched. Drawing on this research for his analysis of major genocides of the twentieth century, Staub (1989) concluded that at least two general conditions militate against empathy. One is material scarcity, which drives people toward preoccupation with personal needs and reduces their sense of connection with others. This was the case in Weimar Germany, and presently in the former Soviet Union. The other condition is an inner-psychic state Staub describes as typified by a weak ego or poorly articulated self-concept. It tends to be characteristic of people who have been traumatized during childhood by an abusive family, or by the chaotic deprivation occurring in war zones, or by any number of other conditions, including family breakups owing to divorce.

Such people are likely to deal with anxiety and stress by using paranoid projection mechanisms, that is, by perceiving others to be the source of their difficulties. A “popular” paranoid scenario related to genocidal events throughout the modern era has centered on the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. A more recent one often mentioned by Americans in private militias is that gun control laws are part of a government conspiracy (probably instigated by Jews) to turn the United States over to the United Nations.

Although there is no substantial evidence indicating that the multiplicity characterizing postmoderns inclines them toward paranoid defense mechanisms, the implications of Staub’s analysis are obvious. The postmodern “empty,” “saturated,” or “dialogical” self may not directly equate to a weak modern ego, but there is enough similarity between these formulations to suggest parallel psychodynamic reactions to scarcity-induced stress. Something along the line of a “blaming the victim” dynamic would certainly fit the free market orientation of postmodern culture.

Turning from psychodynamic theory to a more general level of discussion, however, the final issue demanding consideration concerns differences between modern and postmodern morality. It will be recalled that in contrast to the modern ideal of universal moral values, postmodern moral values were described as “context-dependent evaluative possibilities.” The reactions of postmoderns to genocidal events, therefore, are likely to be complex and variable depending upon the range of possible moral interpretations associated with those events.
The point in question here is nicely illustrated by certain films dramatizing the postmodern mindset toward moral values. In *Pulp Fiction* and *Apocalypse Now*, for example, modern moral values are deliberately confounded by situating characters in amoral contexts and thereby forcing viewers away from any simplistic moral interpretation. The modern films made by John Ford and John Wayne impose straightforward, "predigested" moral values, whereas the moral values in films by Quentin Tarantino and Harvey Keitel are confabulated. The modern films could succeed as popular entertainments because they provided assurances of moral certainties; the postmodern succeed today because they provide assurances of moral ambiguities. A relevant citation—life imitating art?—might be the way the O. J. Simpson murder trial has become a major media entertainment.

Other aspects of postmodern culture also promote complex, relativistic moral perspectives. During the Gulf war with Iraq, television news often presented near-simultaneous reports from both sides of the conflict, and viewers could find themselves being encouraged to cheer for the bombers while almost at the same being encouraged to sympathize with the bombees. Even the abhorrent rationality underlying genocidal acts of terrorism is now widely understood to be a facet of postmodern culture. Thus, terrorism has its logic: when anyone can become a victim, governments are shown to be impotent; when terror attacks generate wide media coverage, they become a public-relations tactic; and when everyone can be defined as a direct or indirect participant in the current world system, there are no innocent bystanders. This is not to say that the logic of terrorism is accepted as legitimate. What is accepted, however, is that as soon as yesterday's terrorist group (for example, the PLO, the IRA) agrees to renounce violence, it becomes a legitimate participant in the world system.

In general, therefore, and in the light of the increasing climate of moral ambiguity indicated above, postmoderns are not likely to make knee-jerk, moralistic responses to genocidal events. On the contrary, the postmodern response is likely to be tentative, inquisitive, and multifaceted. Or in circumstances when the events and victims are remote, apathetic. Insofar as recent American government policies may be taken as prototypical, the tentative, multifaceted response pattern can be seen in the negotiated invasion of Haiti, or the drawn-out, variable efforts to reduce or contain civil warfare in the former Yugoslavia. The apathetic pattern can be seen in the ritual condemnations
but relative indifference that followed the massacre of Chinese students in Tiananmen Square, or the withdrawal of American forces from Somalia. The operative principle of postmodern policy responses to genocidal events may sum up to something like this: "If you can't wait them out, talk them out, or buy them out, then blow them up, but only if the cost-benefit ratio is very favorable."

**Conclusion: A Koan for the Twenty-first Century**

The views developed in this chapter about how postmodern individuals will respond to genocidal events must be taken with a large grain of salt. They are, at best, speculations on the future informed by a present body of fallible knowledge that may not apply. If it does apply, however, it would seem that postmoderns will generally be tolerant, and perhaps indifferent to genocidal events. There is no other plausible conclusion to be drawn from our present knowledge of postmodern culture and personality. All of the relevant cultural factors—the language, imagery, and climate of moral ambiguity—suggest that a growing desensitization is at work. And all of the relevant personality theory and research suggest that the multiplicity characterizing postmoderns facilitates the adoption of desensitizing stress-coping or defense mechanisms.

What this may mean for the future of civilization is the great koan of the twenty-first century. Does it portend a new Dark Age in which a privileged postmodern minority becomes smugly detached from the chaotic genocidal events afflicting everyone else? Or does it portend movement toward a new Enlightenment, in which a privileged postmodern minority will find the means, however slowly and tentatively, to save what can be saved while expanding the world culture base for a liberating multiplicity? Stay tuned...