

The iks by lewis thomas essay sample

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



The view of Lewis Thomas regarding the similarity between the behavior of the Iks and groups of different sizes is not accurate and unsupported by evidence. In his essay, Thomas proposed that the Iks have actually “ gone crazy,” and they did so because society had become unworkable for them. He sees the Iks behavior as a defense mechanism which resulted in each person becoming his own constituency, a city which regards neighbors as competitor-cities. In his observations, he found the Iks behavior very similar with the behavior of different groups like committees, cities and nations.

Thomas said that the Iks are like cities. Iks defecate in their neighbor’s property, detest their neighbors and find the misfortunes of others amusing. Iks do not respect their elders, leaving them to fend for themselves, even going so far as to steal from them. He said that the same is true with cities. Cities defecate on their own backyard. They do this by polluting their rivers and throwing their waste and garbage everywhere. Cities also detest other cities and are entertained when other cities experience misfortunes. They have the same disdain and lack of respect to elders since they build institutions that keep their elders out of sight. (Thomas).

These statements of Thomas regarding the nature of cities seem to be full of hasty generalizations and are unsupported by a single thread of evidence. He did not cite a single empirical data or mentioned a specific example of a city laughing at another city’s tragic fate. Meanwhile, there are recent events that show that his observations are wrong. Other cities in the United States were sympathetic when the cities in Southern California were ravaged by wildfire. In fact, the rest of the nation watched in terror when fire destroyed homes and livelihoods. The same can be said when the Hurricane Katrina hit

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New Orleans. In other parts of the country, there were cries for government assistance for the victims of the calamity; and, post-Hurricane Katrina, other parts of the country were very vocal in their criticisms of the administration's lack of support for the victims of the calamity.

His criticism that cities build institutions that keep their elders out of sight is also unsupported by evidence. This statement could be one way of looking at city-sponsored facilities that house and provide for the needs of the elderly, but this is a distorted point of view. The fact that cities build institutions that house their elders is actually the opposite of what Iks do in their society. Iks abandon their elders when they can no longer help in the gathering of provisions or fend for themselves. They do not respect them and will go even so far as to steal from them. The facilities that cities build or the institutions they create to house elders is a way of showing that cities care for their elders and the cities do not see them as disposable members of the community. A city's intentions in creating institutions and building facilities are often noble ones. These activities are generally viewed as an activity that promote the general welfare and are often costly on the part of the cities. Despite the cost, many cities give these benefits to their senior citizens.

His criticism that cities defecate on theirs and everyone else's doorsteps, rivers and lakes and leave their trash everywhere is another hasty generalization. This may be true for all or majority of the cities in old times, but this is no longer true in modern times. Waste and garbage is a fact of life, it is a product of all organisms. Cities naturally generate large amounts

of this because there is a higher concentration of people per square meter in urban areas than in rural ones. Waste management is obviously a major concern. During the middle ages, before the advent of indoor plumbing, the cities in Europe throw their waste right out the window. This is no longer the case since technology has remedied this problem for most cities in the world. The way I see it, the lack of proper waste disposal in cities is not because it finds that leaving or throwing waste in its own or another's backyard as an amusing way to harass a neighboring city or because it detests other cities. It is only because there are bigger financial and logistical issues that are involved when the population is condensed in a small space. Proper waste management is a battle for cities everyday and advances have been made. In fact, the new trend seems to gravitate towards an environmentally-friendly lifestyle. Businesses are looking for ways to make their product eco-friendly, and part of it is because of the regulations imposed by cities. Many cities around the world have regulations limiting the emissions of a vehicle to a certain level to minimize pollution. Some cities require segregation of garbage so that recyclable materials can be recycled and biodegradable materials can be disposed properly.

Thomas said that Iks are like nations. He finds nations to be the groups most similar to the Iks in nature and behavior. He said that nations are greedy, rapacious, heartless and irresponsible, just like the Iks. He also said that nations are as solitary and self-centered as the Iks. He did not give any reason why he thinks nations are all of those enumerated above, but he did say that nations " bawl insults from their doorsteps, defecate into whole oceans, snatch all the food, take joy in the bad luck of others celebrate the

death of others, live for the death of others." Indeed nations do all these things in the dealings of nations with others, but this is exception and not the rule of modern international relations. Instead of bawling insults from their doorsteps, nations are moving towards globalization. The fact that they are doing so is a big proof against Thomas' premise. Nations formed the World Trade Organization to remove or lower trade barriers. Now, instead of blasting each other over trading right and territories, nations come together to talk. They negotiate, they make concession and they create partnerships for the sake of preserving harmonious relationships with other nations. It is true that this has not always been the case. Nations used to go to war for the sake of trade, but this practice has been outgrown. In a way, it can be said that nations have managed to adapt to their present world, and this is very much unlike Iks.

When I analyze Thomas' conclusions, I saw that he thinks that the Iks abnormal behavior is actually a normal reaction; it is what happens when a group finds out that society has become unworkable for them. Thomas contradicted himself. This statement is an about-face from his earlier statement that the Iks are an anomaly. He, in fact, thinks that the Iks' behavior is all around us, but instead of attributing Iks behavior to man's inherent evilness as the anthropologist who studied the Iks has done, he attributed it to groups, both large and small. He compared the behavior of the Iks with " groups of one size or another, ranging from committees to nations" (Thomas). My own observation of groups' behavior showed that his conclusions are not correct. Cities and nations have not " gone crazy." Cities show concern for their neighboring cities, environment and their elders,

unlike the Iks. In modern times, nations talk instead of brawl. They have realized that the welfare of other nations is inextricably bound to their own and, for most parts, have acted in accordingly.

Work Cited

Thomas, Lewis. The Iks. Name of Book. Publication. Year. page no.