

*Psychoanalysis looks at the*

## Origins of Values in Children

... and the original helplessness of human beings is thus the primal source of all moral motives.

—SIGMUND FREUD, 1895

FROM time to time, society feels impelled to look at its value systems, its traditions to be maintained as well as its goals to be achieved. Such reappraisal usually takes place in times of internal stress or at the moment of dangerous external challenge, and it is often accompanied by overt or hidden anxieties about the future.

The adult world frequently feels then that its children and its youth have no true values and thus will disappoint it. In more sober moments, the adult world blames itself for not having provided the new generation with lasting and workable values, and it searches for the appropriate means of improvement of education, forgetting frequently that the adult himself might be the one in quest for values lost. At such moments the critical and demanding searchlight of public opinion is focused on the educational system and the teachers.

Regardless of the complex psychological and social motives of pressing public

opinion, the teachers will do more justice to their task if they do not respond to this challenge. Rather than seeing it as if it were an unjust and exaggerated accusation, a condemnation of the teaching system, they should see in these social pressures a vexing technical issue, the solution of which asks inquiry into the genesis of values in children as well as their maintenance in the adult generation.

### Learning Readiness

Values are as much a product of society and individual development as they are based on available dispositions in the growing human mind. This is another way of saying that values are not inborn and absolute traits in people, although the capacity to acquire values depends on available psychic structures in each individual. Values can only be learned, no one is born with them. Everyone

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Rudolf Ekstein is Director, Project on Childhood Psychosis, Reiss-Davis Clinic for Child Guidance, Los Angeles; and is Training Analyst, Los Angeles Institute for Psychoanalysis, Beverly Hills, California.

develops some form of value system which may be subject to subsequent modification through appropriate techniques.

The psychoanalyst, as he turns his psychoanalytic insights on the problems of education, sees personality development in terms of *learning readiness*, a dynamic concept which describes the inner conditions which have to develop in order to bring the child to a specific step in learning. Learning readiness, as it pertains to the acquisition of conventional academic skills as taught in school, is fairly well known. Unfortunately this is not as true in the realms of social and personal value systems.

Paradoxically, the very same public which is critical about the school system's lack of emphasis on values is also adamant that the teacher restrict himself to the teaching of conventional skills. The basic three R's are to take priority over the "frills" that lead to values beyond the skill. Large school classes, increasing demand for competitive evaluations of technical skill, competitiveness concerning eligibility for college education, do not promote a process of curriculum development. In such process there is room for genuine exploration of and experimentation with teaching methods concerning stages of learning readiness toward higher ethical and aesthetic values, as well as toward their transmission and creation.

The child comes into the school system already prepared with certain basic "*ego virtues*," a happy term coined by Erikson, the author of *Childhood and Society* (2), which can be considered as the basic ingredients out of which value systems are developed. The child has acquired a balance of trust and distrust; trust in himself and others, but sufficient distrust also which permits the develop-

ment of methods to test and to assess the world he must learn to cope with. He thus has acquired basic trust, an important value ingredient but tempered by the unwillingness to rely on blind faith. Trust in others and confidence in one's self are twins grown from the same matrix. The balance of trust and distrust stems from the early infant-mother situation, the infant's reliance on the mother and her helping him also to rely on himself. This "trust account" refers back to the early helplessness of the human which requires a trustworthy provider who also helps wean the infant toward the first step in self-confidence, the capacity to wait and to feed himself.

All later virtues could not grow successfully unless this first value has become a safe system in the child, which will form the basis of that complex value system that characterizes the personality organization of any human being. Out of the early and complete dependence on the parent will grow trust and self-confidence, as well as their normal counterparts: testing of others and questions about oneself.

### From Impulse to Control

The child is now ready for the development of his simple value system. At first he cannot control his own body and he must be controlled. He must learn to give up impulse and obey external commands. As he passes through the toilet training phase he faces the issue of allowing himself to be controlled, to be disciplined, and to grow toward self-control. This acquisition of inner discipline, of autonomy within societal limits, individualism as well as the acceptance of societal rules, is based on the successful resolution of the earlier trust-distrust conflict.

Thus, by the time that the child must move slowly away from home and develop further values in the school system, he should already have acquired trust, self-confidence, autonomy and an acceptance of society's rules of fair play. He is now ready to try out, train and refine these acquired virtues. He reaches out and becomes more and more curious. The love for truth, the initiative to explore, to find out, to open his mind, to be curious about life, its secrets, his own origin, the nature of interpersonal relationships, the passions of love and hate, the problem of self control, all these confront him.

Whether new virtues and values such as industry and curiosity will grow, will become refined, and allow him to discover during adolescence the values of a defined life purpose, of mature independence and interdependence, of commitment to love and work, will now more and more depend on the public school system, since he has grown out of the family microcosm into the societal macrocosm represented by neighborhood, the school, the church, and the many organized community activities.

### Skills and Values

The child brings to the school his assets and liabilities developed out of the successes and failures of the early family life. However, the assets and liabilities are not so firmly established that the teachers and educators can either "rest assured" or "wash their hands" in despair. There is now much to be done in terms of further growth as well as correction. This task of nursing the small value seedlings to full bloom and to procreative power is now given to the teachers, who form the most important link between family and society,

and the world. They are by choice and by tradition through the example they set the providers of values and skills, of virtues and of knowledge, the seeds of which have been planted in family life. We know that the mechanisms upon which value formation must rely, as it is transmitted from one generation to the next, are imitation and identification, the conscious and unconscious strivings to be like one's ideals, the following of examples, as well as the creative use the child makes of personal or institutional models. We must realize then that the hope for success in this area depends now on the quality of the school system, its leaders and teachers, its overt and covert purposes.

A school which seeks only to provide skills and does not evaluate and elucidate purposes will create technicians who may be valuable to somebody, but who are neither truly valuable to themselves nor value-generating, since they have no true values, no purposes of their own. The skills are but the vehicles toward a goal, but without a goal they will constitute the mere mechanics of life rather than fulfill its purpose, give it a true and lasting value. Teachers who are but transmitters of skills will be technicians rather than models toward value formation. They can become successful identity-models only if they themselves are identified with specified values as part of their professional self.

### A Joint Program

The Reiss-Davis Clinic for Child Guidance, in conjunction with the Los Angeles Institute for Psychoanalysis and the Extension Division of the School of Education at the University of California at Los Angeles, has organized a pilot program for school teachers. This pro-

gram seeks to examine the mutual influences between education and psychoanalysis (1), as well as the question of the applicability of psychoanalytic insights to the teaching process. As a part of this collaborative effort, a group of administrators of elementary schools and consultants to the school systems in the Los Angeles area are trying to define the role of the administrator.

Soon it became apparent that our definition must go beyond the mere technique of running a school, of organizing a curriculum, or assigning rooms, students and teachers, of being responsible to the downtown office, of handling public pressures and of providing good public relations, etc. It was felt that the public school administrator must be seen as a leader, as a provider of stimulus and purpose, as an educator at heart, who educates for a purpose within a context of conscious, clearly enunciated values. He must be a committed person, a dedicated provider of an educational atmosphere for children, parents and teachers alike.

He must go beyond the mere preaching of values concerning a free society, respect for the individual's growth and self-realization, and actively demonstrate these ideals in the technical operations of his various functions. It was felt that he must encourage the values of self-development of his teachers, and must help improve the in-service training and supervision available. He must constantly reappraise curriculum issues in order that knowledge and skill will be integrated with value and purpose.

Usually when we speak of our society's values we mean social responsibility, identification with national purposes, and sacrifice for the community. We tend to overlook the more personal values such as self-realization and personal ful-

filment. We are so much concerned with gross abuse of our value system: the danger of delinquency, selfishness, the unwillingness or inability to meet rudimentary learning tasks, that we lose sight of more positive issues of value which go far beyond the concern of social or personal pathology.

In summary, psychoanalysis suggests that the origin of all values, moral and otherwise, rests in the early child-parent situation. The teacher is much like the gardener who gets the small seedling from the nursery. He must find ways to make values continue to develop and he will do so best if he can help the child to see what is the full meaning of skill and knowledge. This capacity on the part of the teacher depends on a stable committed professional self and on an institutional atmosphere in which the professional self can function in such a way as to fulfil the individual values of the teachers. The origin of value then is the need of the helpless, met by the constant fulfilment of the trustworthy.

The transmitting mechanism of value is the child's identification with the adult generation. The survival of values rests on available opportunity for their fulfilment. Our school system then must accept the need, provide the opportunity and the techniques for identificatory learning, and offer the skills and the knowledge which will maintain the continuity of the individual and the society within our value system which guarantees life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

#### References

1. Rudolf Ekstein and Rocco L. Motto. *Psychoanalysis and Education*. *Reiss-Davis Clinic Bulletin*. Spring Issue, 1964.
2. Erik Erikson. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton & Co., 1950.

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