EDUCATION AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

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THE SUPER MIND MODEL

. Many young people have a profound inability to make decisions for themselves, and for many, the decisions they do make are not seen as a consequence of their own judgement and choice. Rather, their choice is the fault of someone or something outside themselves. In the education and socialization process, we have opted for behavior management and conflict control, at the expense of an education for morally responsible decision making.

. The majority of the people find nothing basically wrong with the current doctrine of external responsibility. They are mainly concerned about a humanist oriented, relevance centered educational philosophy which has, as a main effect, the decline in the student's ability to read and write. So out the window with such things as relevance and humanism, and any educational program designed for meaning and purpose.

. Behavior management and conflict control should be examined carefully before we institutionalize them in the education system. Let us examine the underlying assumptions of human behavior, and pursue a philosophy of education which parallels freedom and moral responsibility.

. Questions concerning the nature of human beings, when pursued to the limit, lead to basic assumptions about will power and decision making capacity. Are humans free from the influence of internal and external forces? Or are they programmed completely by these forces? Theories of human behavior rest firmly on such assumptions. Decisions on the role of education to develop responsible individuals depend on the psychological and sociological models which we adopt. These models fall in three categories: 1) super mind, 2) product mind, and 3) process mind. While the first is no longer regarded as valid, and hence is not at issue, the second is the most widely held assumption in the academic community, and has permeated our entire social structure. Now, we need a model of human behavior and a model of education which emphasize the process of becoming human.

. The super mind model sees the person's mind as a rational, controlling entity, apart from the body, apart from the external world, and even apart from the individual's own unique experiences. Behavior directed by the super mind is always rational and calculated. Bentham's rational calculus illustrates the position (1948). All decisons are made by first calculating the full range of rewards and punishments. Since some individuals' decisions or actions are in conflict with what the majority of the society see as good, laws must be made to protect the majority. Utilitarianism - the greatest good for the greatest number - or what's good for the majority is good for everyone - is the social philosophy for the super mind model. Its potential for tyranny should be evident.

THE DETERMINIST ASSUMPTION

. Contemporary psychology gives little credence to the underlying assumptions of this super mind view of humanity. One such psychologist feels that, ".. this position of man in the world as an absolute will power makes him essentially a cut-off schizoid being who dominates all of reality .. without taking into account any reality in himself, in history, and culture "(VanKaam 1963 117). Today's major theories of human behavior and decision making all stem from an assumption opposite to that of the super mind model.

. This assumption is determinism, and it is probably the single

most influential assumption in recent history, since it is on this foundation that science and the scientific method rest. Given the growing importance of science as a tool for the empirical assessment of all models, a deterministic model of human behavior is a logical and implicit outcome.

. In this determinist model, the person is seen as a product. The person is determined by 1) internal forces, such as drives and complexes; 2) external forces, such as environment, culture, and technology; or 3) a combination of the first two. All such theories are alike in their removal of choice from the individual. Everything is explained by means of past influences of the body and mind. Disclosure of these influences gives the objective information needed to explain and predict behavior.

. Freudian psychoanalytic theory is the principal representatitve of internal determinism. The person is seen as constantly responding to a set of internal demands, broadly categorized as life and death instincts. The ruling principles of the mind are to avoid pain and pursue pleasure. These needs or desires must be tempered to meet the reality of the external world. Life is basically an adjustment between what one wants and what one must settle for. The way a person handles the anxieties stemming from these frustrations and discontents determines the degree to which one is classed as normal or neurotic. If one is able to channel the energy from these repressed instincts into socially acceptable behavior, one is viewed as normal. The person who cannot achieve this sublimation is called compulsive, phobic, neurotic, or psychotic. To help such a person, one must discover the adjustment problem that occurred early in life, probably sometime during the first five years (Freud 1930; 1949). The problem of frustration or discontent one experiences at any time in life can be explained by what has occurred in one's past. fundamentally, one is a "product" of past experiences, and so becomes "determined".

. Most critics of Freud's internal determinism react to the internal, and not the determinist factor. The strongest reactions come from the behaviorists. Contemporary behaviorism, sometimes called operationalism, has as its principal assumption the belief that one's behavior is determined by environment - which is external determinism (Skinner 1971; 1974). Born with a blank recording surface, a person is conditioned by interacting with environmental stimuli. As one grows, the interactions become more complex, due to language. These learned, conditioned responses are linked together, and patterned or expected behavior emerges; and personality forms. Behavior that causes the the individual to become frustrated or unhappy is a product of the controlling conditions. Actions are programed responses over which the individual has no control. One is a product of one's environment and culture. To help such a person, one must modify the controls or conditioning stimuli, which reinforce new and more appropriate behavior patterns - which is behavior modification.

. Both the internal and external theories of behavior have determinism at the core. Skinner believes that ".. a scientific analysis of behavior must .. assume that a person's behavior is controlled by genetic and environmental history, rather than by the person himself as an initiating, creative agent .." (1974 208).

. A danger in the product model lies in taking its assumption, that we are the product of past experience, one step farther. This step encourages the individual to seek responsibility for decisions outside the self. If one is a product of the past, then the present is viewed as a programed response, and not a process of making decisions for which one is

ultimately responsible. Decisions are easily made in what Sartre calls "bad faith." (Sanborn 1968) The agony of choice is avoided by saying something is necessary when in fact, it is voluntary.

THE PROCESS MODEL

. A third model to explain human behavior is essentially a synthesis of the super mind and product models. What emerges is a process view of being, founded on the existential and dialectical nature of the human will. In this model, the will of the individual is neither omnipotent nor impotent. Each individual's unique life history is coupled with an unavoidable demand for personal choice. Sartre said we have no choice but to choose; we are condemned to freedom and its inevitable responsibilities (Sanborn 1968).

. This view cultivates two attitudes in the individual. Taken separately, they seem antithetical, but when fused together as an outlook on life, they offer one strength and authenticity for the future. The first, Allport calls "-tentativeness of outlook .. Since certainties are no longer certain, let all dogmas be fearlessly examined, especially those cultural idols that engender a false sense of security: dogmas of race supremacy, of naive scientism, of unilinear evolutionary progress. Let one face the worst in oneself and in the world around him, so that one may correctly estimate the hazards (Allport 1962 378)."

. The insights stemming from such tentativeness easily moves one to a state of despair, derived from the apparent anomie of the situation. But this sense of despair, when fused with a firm commitment to chosen values, allows attainment of purprose and recognition of freedom. Freedom requires a grappling with despair.

. One should not reject all deterministic factors. They represent one facet of reality. The deterministic model has over emphasized the effect of organic and cultural sources at the expense of removing the human will from the decision process. A unique factor in human existence is that people are free to make their own decisions; they are not programed by either cultural or biological factors unless they choose to believe they are, and act accordingly.

. Humans must face the challenge of discovering meaning and purpose for their life. They must do this while aware of a myriad of paradoxes that would make it all seem absurd, among which is the awareness of their ultimate death. The matter is quite simple. Psychological tricks cloud and complicate the issue. If one chooses to trick oneself, and make a "bad faith" choice, there is an abundance of psychological and sociological theory available to aid the self deception.

. Determinism, whether behaviorist, operationalist, or Freudian, leads one to experience the self as a product, rather than as a process. Metaphorically, he can be seen as a helpless raft, drifting at sea, and unable to alter the course of the raft by his own decisions or choices. One is programed by one's past. One may find oneself searching for certain agents or events in the life history which can be made responsible for one's personal indecisions and failures (Van Kaam 1963). .Their discovery would unburden the subject of the potential anxiety and guilt which are necessarily connected with the acceptance of responsibility. One may say, "I am an alcoholic, a compulsive gambler or shoplifter, or a failure, because I have no choice." This reduces the anxiety and guilt which stems from the reality that I am what I am because I choose to be. The belief that one is merely a puppet being manipulated by some mysterious libidinal instincts or hidden conditioned responses offers a comforting escape from the guilt and anxiety associated with accepting the responsibility for one's own

decisions.

. This can never be accomplished by an educational philosophy and curricula oriented to conflict control and behavior management. In our haste to reinstitute the educational basics - reading, writing, and arithmetic - we are in peril of blocking students from the experiences that are essential for the process of developing moral responsibility. In Szasz's words, ".. in growing up, children learn to what extent they are expected and allowed to take their own lives in their hands. The more they are, and the more they do, the more fully do they develop into autonomous, self determining persons .." (1976 111).

EDUCATION FOR RESPONSIBILITY

. McClelland (1978 114) discovered that love is not enough to create morally responsible adults. While it is important that children feel loved, parents and teachers can buy conformity in moral behavior from them, but at the expense of true moral maturity. They may behave well for morally immature reasons, just to please their parents and teachers. "The best we can do to help is to love .. and not stand in the way of their groping attempts to grow up, or force them at all times to conform to adult centered codes of moral behavior" (McClelland 1978). They must be allowed to learn from their own mistakes. To this end, learning must be viewed as meaningful by the learner. Rogers calls this "experimental learning (1967)."

. Milgram (1974) has illuminated the inherent dangers that lie in our capacity to obey authority. The present trend toward behavior management and conflict control in the educational setting is frightening. We are in danger of re-creating the prelude to the rise of Fascism. For example, the holocaust of Nazi Germany came from the mindless capacity of so many to obey "authority".

. Education is more than reading, writing and arithmetic, and more than a mega machine designed to turn out economic, political, and religious automotons. To make education adequate, we must affirm the process model of human behavior. The goals and values of education, as seen from this position place the student in the center of the process. Education is the process of becoming, and people, as Rogers' phrase implies, are ".. beings in the process of becoming (1961)." Education is what is meaningful. It is what is worth experiencing.

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