

DYNAMIC PSYCHOLOGY
LESSON XI
LAWS OF PSYCHIC DEVELOPMENT

If we observe a few isolated persons who are severely disturbed mentally in a society, we conclude that the upbringing and psychic developmental process in this society is, if not perfect, at least very healthy and in accord with whatever laws of psychic development there are. If, however, as is the case with our contemporaneous society, we observe that far from afflicting a few isolated people, mental imbalance is widespread, must we not conclude logically that these same laws of psychic development must in some way be ignored or violated? That this is indeed the case I shall try to show. I shall also try to show that properly understood and applied, these laws could revolutionize and radically improve our methods of child rearing and adult education.

Recently in the New York Times there was an article about a new kind of talking typewriter which was revolutionizing the treatment of severely disturbed children. Kids who had never spoken in their lives, who were considered by orthodox psychiatry as being "incurable" were able to communicate and even return to school after having been mute for years. Even aggressive, unruly and assaultive youngsters were brought back to cooperative and civilized behavior. How was a machine able to do what psychiatrists had vowed was "impossible"? Merely by being patient and yet firm, exact and yet unpunishing, repetitious yet accurate.

The automated typewriter was programmed like a computer to respond in certain definite ways to anyone who touched the typewriter keys. It was not designed to administer either reward or punishment, nor was it set up to criticize or censure the young child in any way. As the child idly punched the keys or even if it banged at them with its fist, the response was uniform and patient. If the child went over to the machine for the first time and touched any key at random, nothing would happen. When the key A was touched however, a pleasant tone would sound and a man's or woman's voice would say the letter

and at the same time a large picture of A would flash on a TV screen. If then other keys would be punched, no further action would occur until the key B was hit. The same sequence would occur as with A, but with the sound of B and the character B flashed onto the TV. In this way the whole alphabet was presented. As the child became more proficient, the response began to consist of words and simple phrases leading up to complete sentences and finally reciting long stories and educational material.

The response of these "psychotic" children to the machine was phenomenal. Formerly withdrawn, mute or hostile kids would play with the typewriter for hours on end, seemingly endless in their patient exploration of all the possible combinations and words they could find. After a while, as they became more proficient, they would begin to imitate the sounds and when supplied with writing paper would try to copy the letters and words they had learned. One young lad, who previously had refused to utter a word, began spelling out his favorite TV programs and commercials after only a short time at the keyboard. In short order he was talking and experimenting with the operation of the machine.

Nor are its wonders confined to helping severely aberrated children. Its effect on normal children is also spectacular. They make more progress in spelling, reading and writing a few months on this machine than years of classroom work can accomplish with the usual methods. Why is this so? Or more to the point, why do our presently accepted methods of child rearing and education show up so poorly in comparison to an "inhuman" machine. Could it be that our much vaunted and accepted ways of bringing up and educating children are violating some basic law of psychic development? Evidently something is fundamentally wrong with present theories and ideas of how to develop the young mind into a mature and responsible individual.

We could ask ourselves, in what way is the teaching method of the machine different from that of any good teacher or tireless, patient parent or tutor?

But since we do not yet know what the basic laws of psychic development are, we would be guessing. However, it seems to me that we are on firm ground if we challenge existing methods of child training and education on the simple grounds that these methods are not producing the results we require if man is to survive the next few decades. The bombs are getting bigger and the tempers of men holding the triggers on these bombs are wearing thinner each passing day. Unless some radical change is forthcoming, there will be nothing left to change in a few years.

Let us examine in the light of what we have learned about the laws governing the production and distribution of constructs and knowledge in the psyche, the development of the psyche of the child as he grows into an adult. Let us also examine the various theories advanced and taught today to explain and describe this development.

Maybe there is some hidden false postulate in their premises, some uncritically accepted idea which is not in accord with the facts. If we consult the standard, orthodox works on child development and rearing, we are informed that psychic development of the child is a continuous steady process of maturation, with definite steps or stages appropriate for each age level. We also find our old familiar philosophy of adjustment applied to the child rearing process.

Great emphasis is placed upon how to produce an obedient child, how to use elaborate systems of reward and punishment to secure this conformity of the child to the demands of the parents and school. Some books stress the need of the child for love and affection, others say too much love and affection "spoils" the child. One school of thought attributes differences in children's abilities to learn to heredity, others to environment, while another says it is due to a combination of both. There are methods of child rearing in which the parents must cater to the demands of the child, another in which the child's wishes should only be granted if it is "good" or obedient. One author believes in the old-fashioned, "spare-the-rod-and-spoil-the-child" school, while still

another faction believe in the new "permissive" techniques of child rearing.

It seems the net effect of all this bickering and lack of agreement among the "experts" has resulted in general confusion, and many parents have given up on any and all methods of child training, and have taken to "playing it by ear" or just doing whatever at the time "seemed right". Such a policy, or more correctly, lack of one, is probably more harmful than a very strict one. Probably the most important attitude a parent should display toward the child is one of consistent, fair and definite treatment.

Just as man's cultural and social development has been one of alternate progress and decay, of progress and regression, of mighty empires rising and falling, of ideas, inventions seeing the light of day in one civilization, only to be forgotten and rediscovered by a different, later society, independently and slightly different in form, so too is the child's psychic development one of ups and downs, of progress and retreat. Medical and psychological literature is full of cases in which seemingly normal children suddenly become as mute as a congenital mute, as stubborn as formerly they were cooperative. Regression in patterns of child behavior is very common. Many children can be observed to regress spontaneously in stress situations, sucking their thumbs and withdrawing from communication.

We can also observe, if we wish, that children are much more volatile emotionally than adults, that loss of some seemingly insignificant item precious to them can make them miserable for days, or only seconds. In those societies where emotional displays are considered acceptable or are part of the mores, children do not lose their emotional volatility when they become adults. In those communities where emotional reactions to life's stresses is considered bad or is not done, children will usually learn to control their emotional expression. In some societies, there are permissible emotional responses and forbidden ones. As a rule, the children will grow up to be fairly good

perpetuators of the customs, beliefs and aberrations of their parents. Who else can they imitate or take as the models for their own behavior?

One of the most controversial questions in developmental psychology has been the uncertainty as to whether environment or heredity is more important in shaping the character of the individual. The heredity group feels that native endowment is the most important in determining the intelligence, performance and growth of the child. It is a widely held belief of a majority of people who are relatively untrained in science or psychology. It is usually expressed in some such phrase as "blood will tell" or "like father, like son". Those who believe in racial supremacy are tacitly assuming the priority of heredity, as are some doctors who subscribe to various theories of mental disease which have as their basic and unquestioned assumption, the hereditary transmission of mental sets, behavioral patterns and psychic ills.

The heredity theory ignores however, facts which are almost common knowledge, but which we do not take into account when we try to decide between the two conflicting camps. The fundamental fact of child rearing is that if you have a very young child and take it from its parents and raise it in a culture as different from that of the parents as you can find, the child will acquire the language, customs, manners and beliefs of the foster parents, not his real mother and father. A Chinese boy raised in an American home will speak, act and in every way appear to be an American child, yet his heredity will merely give him an outward, physical appearance of a Chinese person. On the other hand if an American child is brought up by Chinese parents as if he were their own child, he will, in spite of bearing no physical resemblance to his parents, behave and act in all respects as if his real parents had been Chinese and not American. The same conditions would apply no matter of which parents the child was born, he would acquire the speech, culture and ways of his foster parents.

Children who are brought up in one environment at an early age and then are transported to a different one,

depending upon the age at which this transfer occurs, there will be a greater or lesser influence upon the child. For example, a child learns to speak the language or languages in his environment beginning about two years old, but if he is moved out of the area where one of them is no longer spoken, at about this age, he "forgets" this second language rather quickly. If however he uses two languages up until the age of nine or ten, he will speak and understand both perfectly, without trace of accent or uncertainty. If he is then moved away out of the area in which one of the languages is not used, he will become rusty in this language, but will "pick it up again" very quickly if returned to such a language region.

On the other hand, if a child has been brought up hearing and understanding only one language, and a particular dialect of that language to boot, he will have little or no difficulty learning a new one, provided he is shifted to the new language area at an early enough age. How old is early enough? This age varies, but in general it ceases in most youngsters at about the age of puberty. If a young adolescent is brought to a strange land where they speak a new and unknown tongue, at first he will be bewildered, but eventually he will begin to understand. His language skill will hardly ever begin to approach that of a six or seven year old in this regard. No matter how long he is in the foreign country, he will rarely be able to speak the language without a pronounced accent. His command of the idioms and grammar will never be as good as that of a small boy of eight and even little children will ask, "Why does the young man speak so funny?"

Nor does only the language mental set solidify at puberty, at this age he also begins to become more and more opinionated and obstinate in his views, and the open-mindedness of childhood changes gradually to the dogmatism of middle and old age. Even among the ones who rebel against the upbringing they have received, who form the avant-guard, or beatnik groups, usually express their rebellion and non-conformity in ways

which reveal a blind, unreasoning reaction to all that they have learned and absorbed in the growing up process. They cannot be selective in their rejection of the beliefs of their fathers and the society in which they were raised, they usually can only reject the good with the bad, the sound experience with the unsound dogma. One could say that these non-conformist groups are as dogmatic and conforming in their way as the ideas and principles they blanketedly reject. It is like cutting off a finger because the toenails hurt.

The history of man has been one of constant revolt by the younger generations against the ideas, traditions and institutions of the older generation. This revolt begins to peter out as the youth gets older, and he in turn finds himself defending the ideas and institutions he helped found against the new heresies of the rising generation after him. The net result through the years has been the gradual accretion of laws, customs and traditions which represent the sound ideas of our forefathers as well as their mistaken notions. Just institutions along with the unjust ones are perpetuated for centuries mostly because the problems involved are not ones which can be solved merely by a change of personell.

One of man's abilities which has saved him countless times, has been his unique quality of reason, of adapting means to ends, of changing the face of nature to suit his requirements, rather than waiting for nature to provide him with what he need to survive and be happy. Civilization is the result of man's past efforts to alter nature to provide himself with the best available means for making a living and carrying on his race. Contrary to what current orthodox psychology teaches about man, he is not an adjusting animal, but rather an adjuster, a bender of trees to forms traps, a builder of dams to provide himself with bigger muscles. It is not nature which has made men into conforming, adjusting citizens, but the false beliefs which have been instilled into his conscious mind by those in power bent upon retaining their rule and seeking to keep him in subjugation as long as it is economically profitably to do so.

We are just begining to appreciate what the needs of the psyche are, just as we learned not too long ago what the needs of the body are through nutritional research. What are those things which nourish the psyche? Is it possible to determine what needs are vital and which ones are marginal or luxuries in a sense? Are some stimuli received by the psyche beneficial to it while others stunt its growth, blunt its perceptions and rob it of its rightful powers?

For the answer to these and similar questions we must search for the natural laws governing the development of the psyche, or perhaps it is just one law. At any rate, unless we discover what are the essential ingredients for nourishing an infant psyche up through the formative years into adulthood without shutting off its inherent abilities and powers, without stunting its growth, we will have a vegetable at the end rather than an intelligent, reasonable, cooperative, highly motivated individual. We shall be looking for incidents, events, treatments, or mistakes that may be decisive in determining why a psyche becomes distorted, aberrated, ill or shut off from the bright promise of early youth.

Just as in almost every other branch of science, the Law of Parsimony also applies to the psyche. This means simply that we seek to satisfy our psychological desires with the least possible conflict and effort. Given limited psychic energy, and the inability to use all of it because of blocks, implants, psychosomatic ills etc..., it is only natural for man to seek to satisfy his desires with the least possible expenditure of unnecessary energy. This means that he will tend to ration his stores of psychic energy in relation to the importance or intensity of the desires he seeks to satisfy.

Whatever comes easy to him, he will be able to utilize almost at will; whatever comes to him with great strain or effort, he will either avoid or do rarely. Few persons deliberately do something because it is difficult, painful or unrewarded. Quite the con-

trary, a person who sought to satisfy his desires with great effort, or in a painful fashion would be considered aberrated.

In order for man to satisfy his adult desires, he must be able to employ his hands and brains toward getting from nature those nutrients which are necessary for his as well as his offspring's healthy growth. It is necessary for him to be able to apply his energies to natural resources without having to pay too high a price for this right. In addition, once he has produced services or wealth by this means, he also has the right to enjoy these fruits of his labor. Politically he has a right to a voice in choosing those who are to represent him in the council chambers of the land. In addition, he has the various rights exemplified in the bill of rights and in the Constitution. These are his basic economic and political rights as we appreciate and understand them at the present stage of our social development.

Man also has psychological rights, as does the child and growing adolescent. Neglect of these rights can be as decisive in psychological development as the callous denial of our political and economic rights is decisive in the growth of a nation or society. We cannot violate with impunity the basic laws of growth, be they economic, political or psychological. Denial of a basic right in any field immediately sets up a pressure or void depending upon the case, and the delicate balance of nature is disrupted. The existence of world unrest, mounting political pressures and economic stagnation are all due to denial in some way of man's basic inherent rights to the fruits of his labors and the exercise of his faculties.

Before man can control his environment so as to be able to extract from it a livelihood, he must be able to understand it, to be able to identify the various components it contains, accurately and without ambiguity. In short he must be able to communicate with it as fully as possible, assimilating the messages it sends out continually and interpreting these messages

in the light of his reality and experience. Without the ability to communicate with the world he finds around him, he cannot understand or control it. He will be as a child with all communication coming in but no realization of its significance, meaning or importance. Without the powerful tools of postulates, cause and effect relationships and mental constructs to make sense out of the confusing welter of sights, sounds, smells and tastes in this world, man would be at the mercy of each minute-to-minute change in his environment.

Full communication with the outside world means no forbidden subjects, no taboos, no denial of any view, sight or sound, so long as it is not physically harmful. There are no views, sounds or smells which are damaging to the developing psyche by themselves. What is or can be harmful is a misplaced emotion or slighting remark made by someone when an essentially neutral stimulus is being presented to the senses. There is no such thing as a dirty word, only dirty minded people. There are no such things as obscene sights, only obscene people, who if they had been so brainwashed, would believe that eating was obscene, or that kissing was vulgar. In some Eastern cultures, it is considered obscene to kiss in public or show movies with kissing in them. Such scenes are censored out of movies shown in these countries.

But important as communication is for proper understanding of life's processes and survival, its main purpose is to enable man to control his environment and himself. One communicates in order to control, not vice-versa. Without communication with one's self internally and with the outside world via the senses, control of the environment is impossible. With communication, control becomes possible providing the communications from the environment are properly interpreted and understood. These signals from the environment must be as accurate and true to the original as possible and there must be little or no lag in the receipt and recognition of these messages.

The prime requisite for effective control of oneself and the outside world is accurate, up-to-the-split-second data regarding internal and external events.

If a growing child is not permitted to communicate with his environments fully or he is prevented from exercising some control over his surroundings and the persons with whom he comes in contact, he will not be able to develop to the full extent of his potential. This means that the growing child should have a private place of his own which he can keep as he sees fit, without any interference from outsiders, including parents. He should be obeyed on occasion and obey as well. Reciprocal communication and control is the essence of human cooperation. One should oppose one's fellows with good will when one does not agree with their decisions.

According to medical science, all of the gross organs of the body are developed and recognizable during early months of pregnancy. Any physical defects due to the genetic blueprint or maternal deficiencies originate during this period. After birth, during infancy, the emotions appear and unless dealt with properly, the child will fail to control his emotional expressions. Later on, during childhood and adolescence, the ability to use the reasoning faculties develops and any interference with psychic maturation at this stage acts to stunt intellectual growth.

Therefore the Law of Psychic Development can be expressed like this:

THE PSYCHE DEVELOPS IN MEASURE AS IT CAN COMMUNICATE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PURPOSES OF CONTROL AND CAN ALSO BE COMMUNICATED TO BY OTHERS AND CAN ACCEPT CONTROL FROM OTHERS.

Human beings are designed to function together, to cooperate in harmony and peaceful endeavor. Anything which tends to disrupt this natural tendency to trust and work with each other leads to emotional upset and strife. Anything which tends to bring people closer together in a spirit of mutual self help and cooperation will raise emotional tone to the higher levels, which will further increase man's abilities to reason and act

intelligently. Men working together without strife or hostile feelings developing can transform this second rate planet into a veritable paradise. Men fighting and warring with each other with the weapons now at their disposal can transform this planet into a new star or super-nova, perhaps alerting other creatures in this universe, if they exist, that there goes another unsuccessful culture.

Science-fiction writers have often said that the only way that earth could become united into one world, working together for common goals and purposes would be if an invasion of flying saucers were to attack us and demand total earth surrender. If they were really clever, they would only show themselves occasionally and supply both sides in every dispute with arms and ammunition, letting drop a new idea or invention which would increase man's weapons power. In fact any invader from space who wanted to take over earth for their own colonization purposes could do no better than supply all dissident groups in the world with super-weapons and ammunition to fit. They would not have long to wait for us to annihilate ourselves right off the map.

Properly understood and applied, however, I believe that the principles of psychology as outlined in this book could go a long way toward restoring a large measure of cooperation and understanding between the peoples of this globe. Perhaps, instead of being hostile and just waiting for us to blow ourselves to kingdom come the flying saucerites are only watching and waiting for us to become intelligent enough and emotionally stable enough so they can communicate with us and bring us the vast knowledge of a vastly superior galactic civilization. Maybe they are testing us to see if mankind can qualify for admission into such a higher civilization. If we continue as we have been, I doubt very much if we ever shall.

The dream of man has been to someday reach the stars, if we all pull together it will be easy.