

Education of the Will as the Wellspring of Morality

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In the face of increasing violence and aggression, the question becomes more and more pressing: How can education contribute to the moral development of children and adolescents? The usual approach to the problem often assumes that one has only to explain the rules of social behavior to children and that better insight will automatically lead to an improvement of behavior. Experience shows, however, that one doesn't reach the source of behavior in this way. Intellectual moralizing or giving reprimands do not deeply affect the way children act. The sources of moral—or immoral—action reside in that unconscious layer of the soul in which the will impulses originate. Therefore Michaela Glöckler asks: What really reaches this sphere at the different stages of child development? How does the education of the will create the conditions from which morality proper can develop when the child comes of age?

When we talk about education of the will, the question immediately arises if the will can be educated at all, because we look upon the will as something that belongs uniquely to ourselves. We feel it is our private domain in which we want to be sovereign, increasingly so the more we become able to assess our own position in life. Our hackles go up as soon as we feel interference in this personal realm, or, as it was called in the '60s at the time of the student revolutions, feel “manipulated.” Manipulation of the will was *the* catchword that kindled the emancipation movement for spiritual liberation of the students.

One can ask the question posed above at an even more fundamental level: does education always have to be interference? Or could one think of an education in which one takes over the responsibility until the child comes of age, taking the place of the child as it were, until the reins can be passed on? After all, full maturity and responsibility is a goal that we only reach—if we're honest about it—between age twenty or thirty.

In the deliberations below, we shall connect the question regarding an education without manipulation to another question: How do we reach the will of the child at all and motivate the child or adolescent, taking into account the different stages of development? I would like to understand will here not as vacillating deliberations and vague feelings with regard to possible courses of action, but as the impulse to carry out what we are actually able to achieve. Will results in activity; and when we do nothing, our will is actually not functioning at that moment.

Willed action, however, not only comprises physical actions such as moving tables, setting up house, pursuing a professional craft, handling machines, etc. It also means being engaged, body and soul, in thoughts and feelings. Of course we can also think

without conscious engagement of the will and give ourselves over to associations as in daydreaming, where we do not employ our will power and surrender to whatever wells up from within. In our feeling life this corresponds to abandoning ourselves to our emotions and reacting spontaneously to any stimulus. We do, however, have the option to engage our will consciously and, for example, digest the feeling, replace it with another one, or even choose not to react. Whoever has tried knows that it isn't always easy to exercise influence on feelings and thoughts by dint of the will. We meet this phenomenon also in the sphere of our actions. Even when we are under the impression that we exert conscious control over our actions, we are capable of doing things which in retrospect we have to judge differently and come to the realization: I didn't really want to do that, that wasn't I; I have acted without proper involvement of my ego. In other words, we can think, feel, and also act in such a way that our waking ego doesn't actually take part.

I would like to go on now to explore the stages of the education of the will and the way children and adolescents can be motivated. This will be based on the premise that the aim is not to promote the exercise of the will without ego or to live out impulsive actions arising out of the body. Instead, the education of children and adolescents should require that I be responsible to the personality at every step of the educational process, always bearing in mind what is age appropriate for the student in my care. Thereby I would like 'education of the will' to be understood as something which one could designate as the willingness of the human being to act spiritually, emotionally, and physically in proper relationship to the ego, to the person.

Education of the Will in the Early Years

When we observe the developmental phases of the child, we discover characteristic learning dispositions and corresponding ways for education to work on the will. At preschool age, in the so-called phase of sensory-motor intelligence, the child's motor system is closely linked to the visual impressions and to all other sensory stimuli. One reaches the will of the child (i.e. her movement organism) and mobilizes her willingness to act by way of the surrounding sense impressions, by giving her examples to imitate which causes her to exercise her will. Even though the child orients herself so readily to examples and spontaneously engages her will in that way, everything still has to be learned, so there always is a certain threshold to be conquered. It is most impressive to witness this conquering of a threshold when children learn to walk, which, all in all, takes about a year until the first small steps really succeed and become more certain. Learning from examples even goes so far that children imitate all kinds of peculiar characteristics of the gaits of adults around them. It shouldn't be underestimated how much exertion of the will and effort is needed to achieve all this early in life. This goes to show that the education of the will is identical with learning, with building up the ability to learn, and we see the same principle at work when we proceed to other levels. Education of the will on a physical level has to do with dexterity and coordination; it means developing integrated, well-adapted motor skills. Correspondingly, moving to the level of soul and spirit, education of the will means building up a maximum ability to handle emotional and mental processes. Thus one can say that there is no learning process resulting in a skill we can use later on which is not the result of an effort of will. All capacities we have

at our disposal as adults have been gained by exerting ourselves earlier on.

We can add a further experience when we ask the question: What prompts children to imitate most readily? For example, when a child talks back and doesn't want to follow, what induces her immediately to change her mind and comply, even though she just protested? When this child notices that the adult has something really important in mind and is deeply interested in pursuing that, all protest will vanish into the background. When the adult fully identifies with whatever she is engaged, she creates the best conditions for the child to enter into her intention. The child absorbs that through her senses and will attempt to imitate it. That way she makes it into her own movement, her own activity and her own dexterity.

Motivation of the Will during the Elementary School Years

The phase characterized above, during which it is enough for the adult to be involved in order to motivate and enthuse the child, lasts until the 8th or 9th year at most. If the mode of learning described above would remain the same, we wouldn't encounter the many educational challenges that occur from here on until puberty. At the beginning of elementary school, children can no longer be motivated directly by just giving an example. The demands of the motor system begin to take second-place and it becomes possible for children to sit still for longer periods of time. Then begins a phase when the will can only be mobilized when children like something. That occurs because during this developmental phase, the will is no longer directed by the sense impressions but by the feelings. The best incentive now comes from the teacher who is fully engaged in what she says or deems right to such a degree that her own enthusiasm and deeply-felt conviction set the feelings of the child in motion. For example, the teacher will have succeeded in speaking about Caesar if a pupil comes home every day and feels inspired to recount his mother the latest about Caesar, because he's so completely engaged by the subject. A few days later, he comes home, throws his backpack in a corner, and runs up to his room past the open kitchen door where his mother is waiting for the next installment about Caesar. All he can utter is, "Mom, Caesar is dead!" Deeply moved, he throws himself onto the bed and can hardly deal with Caesar's assassination. It doesn't matter if a sixth grader knows exactly when Caesar was born and died, or when the battles were. What has an educational effect at this age is what moves the will through the feelings, such as the digestion of strong feelings of sadness and indignation illustrated by this example.

Insight as a Motivator of the Will of the Adolescent

At the end of the elementary school years, or at the latest the beginning of high school, the teacher notices that biographies don't reach the pupils in the same way. At the onset of puberty, teenagers can no longer be motivated primarily through their feelings. Youngsters are much more likely to become motivated when they are able to act out of understanding. Without thought or insight adolescents don't feel motivated. They will sometimes even opt not to do things they actually like when they don't see the sense of doing them. A toddler overcomes her dislike of learning when she has an example she loves. A grade-school child overcomes a lack of engagement when she experiences

strong interest and understanding in an adult, which have the effect of enthusing her and mobilizing her will. An adolescent needs a grown-up who is full of questions, who is striving for understanding and teaches the pupils out of this quest. When the students sense this search in a teacher, they can relate. Teachers who embody this ideal tend to be most beloved.

When the high school teacher brings the material in such a way that she gives the facts but leaves the act of will which is necessary to gain insight to the pupils themselves, the capacities of will are being awakened on a spiritual level. To illustrate this, I would like to describe an example from a physiology block in 10th grade, in which we had just discussed the circulation of the blood in the human being.

I had told the students about the discovery of the closed circulatory system by William Harvey. In Harvey's day, people thought that the blood was built up by the nutritional processes in the center of the body and was used up in the periphery. It wasn't yet known that the blood returns to the heart, but it was known through dissection that the heart is astonishingly small and can only hold about 70 ml of blood. By feeling the pulse, it had been observed that the heart typically beats about 80 times per minute. Having learned this, the class began to make up the craziest theories about how Harvey had come to see that the blood must circulate in a closed system. Finally one pupil reasoned as follows: When the heart passes on 70 ml of blood with every pulse, 80 times per minute, the total volume of blood of 5.6 liters has to pass through the heart every minute. If one calculates the volume per hour and then multiplies that by 24, the total amount of blood circulating in a day is thousands of liters. Since no human being can eat or drink as much as would be necessary to produce such a huge quantity of blood, the student concluded that the blood must return to the center.

The pupil who was able to develop this logical train of thought was not one of the most capable students and had not actively involved himself in class up to that point. It was almost like experiencing an archetypal pedagogical situation when I witnessed how the whole class participated in the boy's happiness at having found the right solution, and everyone shared his triumph because it had been prepared by all of them, each pupil having wrestled with this problem. Coming to such an individual insight can make an adolescent into a different person because he feels a direct connection to his will, having mastered the problem by his own efforts. This results in increased self-confidence and a feeling of being able to think independently. This triumphal feeling can last for weeks, and the teacher can use it by keeping this confidence alive.

How Education of the Will Builds Self-confidence and Becomes a Wellspring of Morality

We now come to the essence of what it means to educate the will. We must offer the children age-appropriate materials in such a way that it induces them to become active themselves. All that happens in school, be it examples, stories, or other pedagogical stimuli, should, in the last analysis, serve to bring out independent activity. Learning to

walk is something you have to do yourself, digesting feelings is something you have to learn yourself, and grasping things intellectually is something you have to accomplish yourself, no matter if others have understood the same things before you. It would mean nothing for your own development if things were taken in purely as information. Seen this way, education of the will always means awakening the pupil's own activity and therefore is *the* most important school for building self-confidence.

When you're clumsy, you feel uncertain inside your body. When you have no self-control, you will lack confidence in your contact with other people. Inasmuch as the will has been addressed and exercised at different levels during education, self-confidence will be anchored on corresponding levels of body, soul, and spirit. Thus the education of the will should have as its main aim the strengthening of self-confidence in children and teenagers.

Many people today are extremely self-conscious; they tend to be highly awake, sensitive, and vulnerable. At the same time they suffer from an enormous lack of inner firmness and self-confidence, which can often be traced back to a development of the intellectual capacities which has taken place without a corresponding education of the will. This confronts us with the question: How can the education of the will become a source of morality? For it is so that a human being who is out of touch with herself and therefore has no self-confidence will have no access to the sources of her own morality. When we say morality—in whatever way we would like to define the term—we mean in the last analysis: dependability, reliability and the capacity to become interested, without which it is impossible to relate to anything or anyone. Connecting in a moral way essentially means connecting inwardly, and without involvement of the ego a moral bond is impossible among people. When a healthy relationship to our own inner being has not been established by building up a healthy self-confidence, we have no access to the wellspring of morality.

In present-day social circumstances, the will threatens to derail more and more in the form of aggression and violence. Violence and extremism are the results of a failed education of the will, for a successful education of the will leads to a strong, dependable relationship to the world. On a physical level the child learns dexterity by handling and mastering the things of the world, and in so doing learns to relate to the earth. Later children learn to get involved on a soul level by feeling empathy and compassion, they establish a relationship to the world with their hearts, and finally, as their powers of comprehension ripen, with their heads. Inhuman actions can only arise in situations where the human being cannot establish a relationship.

Obstacles to the Education of the Will

An education of the will is being thwarted because we unwittingly do things which prevent children from developing the right things at the right time, for instance, by furthering the motor system in the early years and the capacity to feel and think later on. Young children are deprived of movement. We drive them everywhere, we give them few opportunities to exercise their limbs, and we set them in front of the television, where

they sit still. Maybe it is not our intention, but in doing so we practice an education in which the ego is constantly being forced to detach from the will. By forcing the ego thus to detach from the will in the motor system, the processes of growth and development at this age are taking place for hours on end without participation of the ego. As a result there will be an increased tendency to act without participation of the ego, and this tendency arises directly out of the physical constitution, it is body-bound.

During the elementary school phase we likewise encounter obstacles which stand in the way of entering into things with the feelings. This will especially be the case when the education is inartistic, one-sidedly intellectual, or oriented too much toward passing on information. All too often the pupils experience how teachers will be almost apologetic, explaining to them that they also find the material boring and uninteresting but are forced to pass it on to the students. Therefore everything the teacher brings to the young pupils must be something in which she is deeply interested. Nothing lames the development of the will in the second phase more than critical aloofness, intellectualism, and the abstract passing on of information, which breeds in the pupils a mocking, distant attitude towards the world.

The third type of obstacle, which we see especially in high school, is a certain type of relativism—uncertainty on a spiritual level. In that type of thinking everything is possible, nothing seems binding anymore, and there is no real responsibility to the truth. Pragmatism prevails, the question is no longer whether a thing is true, but whether it is doable. This touches on a central problem facing scientists today.

Present-day culture directly forces our children and youth to bail out—in body, soul, and spirit. The ego is no longer given a chance to become interested and is in essence barred from establishing a meaningful relationship to the world; therefore we have to resign ourselves to existing circumstances which are no longer accessible to our will.

A few years ago an article appeared in the German magazine *Spiegel* about a new kindergarten in Hamburg which had specialized in children of drug addicts. There it was found that three things that can counteract possible addiction in the children: The first requirement is to free the mind of any prejudice when talking to the child and to show absolute interest in everything she brings. With this should go openness and acceptance. In our hearts, we should carry an attitude which gives a child the feeling, “You are just right; I like you just the way you are,” Thirdly, it is important to give the child, once a day at least, a clear sense of achievement: “You did it!” It was found that children thrive in these circumstances, regardless of educational content they receive besides, and, *Spiegel* reports optimistically, the children won't be tempted to grab the needles lying around at home. Thus one may actually have trust that these dangers can largely be avoided when an interest in the world has been awakened and a can-do attitude has been fostered.

From Education to Self-education

Even with a successful education of the will, things can go wrong, either in youth or later

in life. Something can throw a wrench in the works and everything will be brought into question. Even with the fruits of a good education and all the necessary prerequisites, the human being repeatedly comes to stand in front of an abyss and must ask: Do you have the will or not? Thus we come to realize that the best education of the world doesn't release us from the endless daily effort to transform education into self-education; it is part of being human.

This brings us to a large problem for present-day society, because our culture provides little incentive to take our own inner development in hand. Recently, I have met many people who told me with regard to the atrocities perpetrated in Yugoslavia: "I have come to the limits of my comprehension. I cannot stand this any longer. It is impossible for me to come to terms with this." This shows how hard it is today, especially for young people, to be exposed to the inhumanity in the world without sliding into a state of despair about existence as a whole. This challenge often deprives people of their vitality. We can thus see a trend in modern historical development that challenges us to come to a real inner decision: Do I have the will to devote myself wholeheartedly to bringing more true humanity into the world? Morality is always a question of decision and commitment. Even with a very good education I can still behave very badly at times when, I have made wrong decisions.

The source of morality only becomes a living experience when we begin to make decisions without the involvement of parents or teachers. Even when pupils willingly accept things that have been decided for them, sooner or later in life they will notice that certain decisions have to be made anew at one point, this time independently. This shows that education of the will alone, while giving access to the source of morality, isn't enough to unlock this source. Only the free human ego can do this by a conscious decision to live and work in a way that is worthy of true humanity. Therefore morality can mean no less than an ongoing, lifelong struggle to participate honestly and lovingly in the evolution of humanity and the individual, both at home and at work.

Acting Out Of Love and Freedom

We now come to the most delicate point of this theme—to the point where we as individuals must confront ourselves, where we discover our limits and realize the extent of our powers of will, compassion, and insight. Here we must face the questions: With the possibilities at my disposal, how do I find the strength to do something constructive for the progress of those around me and for the world as a whole? Where are the ideas and the ideals that give me moral orientation? If, at that point, I cannot wholeheartedly say yes to the course of action I decide for myself, it won't be a true moral action. It may be something good which serves others, a useful action at best, but it will only be a moral action when I do it with the full involvement of my ego, when it is an expression of my being. That means when I love what I do and act out of free choice.

As far as the source of morality is concerned, freedom and love are identical concepts. Thus we can only feel truly motivated for our actions, when we can retain our individual integrity, when we know why we do something. We are moral in our feelings when we

can meet others and ourselves with interest and know where we stand. We come to a moral relationship to the world in our thinking when our quest for knowledge is directed towards truths and honesty.

We can grasp the ego as source of our personality in a threefold way. We can experience it as ego consciousness, which gives us the sense of a unified being. On the one hand, we experience it as the strength of self-confidence, on the other as consciousness or center, as I. As soon as we employ the ego, we do so on the level of thinking, feeling, or willing. Therefore this ego manifests in a threefold way: as love for truth, as love for our fellow human beings and the world, and as the striving for autonomy and freedom. These qualities are constantly being threatened by the fact that we are tempted to be dishonest and loveless.

We see that the ego lives between the ideal and a counter-ideal. The ego holds the middle between the longing for truth and mendacity, between the capacity for love and hatred, between the striving for freedom and lust for power. This source of morality is constantly endangered from within by our lower ego, which always threatens the higher ego. It is only possible for us to conceptualize this higher ego in the form of ideals and we can only, so to speak, pull it down into ourselves. If, however, we didn't have the lower ego, which always wants to hinder us from rising above ourselves and conquering our egotism, we would not be able to be moral beings. Animals have no choice but to act according to the behavioral patterns of their species; only human beings can act immorally. We are not complete at birth, and our physical, psychological and spiritual constitution doesn't keep itself in balance. As we grow older we become aware of the necessity of self-education. This involves acceptance of the way we are, and a free resolve to act in the world according to our gifts and capacities. In contrast to the animals, we are always evolving, working to realize our potential. Because of this, human beings are capable of immoral deeds; we can make mistakes and stray from the path. A successful education of the will is therefore a good preparation for a second birth later in life, where we take our education into our own hands. Such a step is a sign of healthy self-confidence and self-knowledge. What a feat to break through to the source of morality, to become truly self-reliant, to become oneself! When this succeeds, it is indeed a most infectious thing for those around to witness. Schools today must therefore be places, where people can experience how infectious health is!

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