
VALUES AND ENPOWERMENT

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At social gatherings where variables and potential are apprehended by host and guest, two topics are politely and assiduously avoided: politics and religion. The voicing of conviction or belief can render mute the merriest milieu and transform the tinkle of glasses and hum of relaxed chat into the thunderous quiet of dread. A "new-age" version of this evasion poses as instant neutrality (a grayish word nonetheless with military connotations) and at the mention of principles or values, protests that any standard is fine for the individual (who however is considered closed-minded when affirming them too publically), then quickly slows the tempo of talk to the merits of brown rice and tofu.

A modern species is appearing at the outer confines of open-mindedness: "No-mindedness." As the pendulum swings from fanaticism to a total lack of values, the number of firmly-held beliefs may decline from only one to zero; the digits are dismal even though they be the binary alpha and omega of computer alphabets.

How can the expression of religious and political values wield such control over conversation and create such tension between human beings? Perhaps issues of power and control themselves reside near the heart of the question. Could it be that, wary from centuries of Machiavellian manipulation by church and state and bruised by ancient memories of inquisition, people are keeping silent on these important matters? Often those who do have values don't speak up for fear of being ridiculed by those who cannot or will not take a stand. The latter in turn might secretly envy the former for having some structure in their belief systems. Both experience frustration and distress.

Despite gaining the upper hand (often called conquest) over the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms of nature via the inimitable human attribute of reason, our grip on the affairs of the fourth and our own kingdom seems to be weakening as control of the planetary situation slips through our fingers. In fact, polls indicate a growing sense of hopelessness among the general population regarding the future of civilization. The accompanying sense of powerlessness to effect any change breeds depression and apathy. This can lead to a critically dangerous spiral bottoming out at nothing less than nuclear holocaust.

As the stakes get higher and the risk greater, people are asking bigger questions, like "Who am I?" and "What am I to do?" Indecision, however is becoming epidemic. The choices we make reflect how we value ourselves and if the ability to judge what is important is seriously impaired, the resulting paralysis in decision-making could be very dangerous to our health.

Though the suicide rate may be edging up in many countries, survival remains fairly high on nearly everyone's priority list. After all psychological, philosophical and spiritual considerations, the "bottom line" for this earthly existence is "just staying alive." Yet probably for the first time in the history of mankind, the whole race acknowledges the very real possibility of imminent and total annihilation but seems incapable of mustering the strength necessary to avert it. The state of the nations could be diagnosed as pathological and some preventative medicine prescribed.

Of both remedial and etymological interest are the meanings of the Latin root

of the word "value" (valere--to be strong) and the origin of its Anglo-Saxon equivalent, "worth," which derives from the Old English "weorthan" (to come to be). To come to be strong amidst an increasingly hostile environment cannot but enhance both the individual and the collective chances for survival. But where are the values that will empower us to take control of our destiny?

The institutions of church and family which once provided a framework for our lives are weakened and we search elsewhere for meaning. Society, hungry for pith, hunts for substance in the media jungle, which because of its commercial orientation, only magnifies and mirrors back the more material aspects of its audience. Many individuals turn to society itself, hoping that somehow through strength of numbers, truth will have filtered down to an acceptable and applicable common denominator ("If all my friends are doing it, it must be O.K.") But even our current folkways and mores, instead of evolving on the historical testing ground of time, today are being dictated to us by the fickleness of fashion and fad. Certainly some values must change with the needs of the age, but in an age of instant gratification values can get sticky, like used gum that, once discarded, continues to adhere, but to the soles of our boots where the sun seldom shines.

Exhausted, confused and craving the nourishment that structure and meaning can give to life, many now seek help from counsellors, psychiatrists and psychotherapists. But even here the question of values is too often tossed about like a hot potato. Even though psychology increasingly recognizes that valuations are unavoidable, some therapists do indeed avoid the issue, often with the legitimate fear of influencing the therapy through imposition of their own standards. An even stronger deterrent may be the anxiety that their own possible confused or sticky value systems could be brought to light or called to account in the process.

Yet helping people to clarify their own values may be the most important aspect of psychotherapy. Insight as to why we are the way we are is not enough unless it translates into effective response in our behavior and attitudes. The principal ploys resisting change in behavior, according to character typology around the "sensitivity cycle"(1) of Hakomi Therapy, are deception and delay. The

so-called "psychopathic" (or tough/generous) type's issue is power and its misrepresentation. The issue of the "masochist" or enduring type is freedom and the paralyzing hopelessness of its attainment. Underlying both these is the deeper issue of guilt--too much (to enable response) in the case of the masochist and not enough (to ensure responsibility) in the psychopath.

The inheritors of Judaism and Christianity have done much to instill in our psyches the concepts of sin and punishment to the point of thwarting the development of those very attributes taught by the Founders of those religions--law and order (Moses) and love (Christ). Total disregard for love (feeling) and the law (will) or submission to the fear of their expression has created a Sargasso Society where the winds of freedom and power no longer blow in our sails and our progress is stuck in the flotsam and jetsam of shipwrecked values.

However all is not inert and inept. Where there is life there is hope and even death is followed by rebirth. There must exist an opposing force to this stagnation at the response barrier, which, when fired in the crucible of crisis, will create a new synthesis, a new process of resolution. Indeed, as the formerly nurturing institutions of the civilization we have known break down around us, we are being forced to look inside and discover who we really are and what is important to us. Large areas of control which have been mostly of the outer parental type are being transferred to the individual. Humanity is like an adolescent coming of age and the new responsibility is at the same time exhilarating and overwhelming. Many of the old rules (stultifying and rigidly applied in the past) are being broken and many of the old goals abandoned.

But can there be freedom without any structure? When the pendulum swings back to the middle, it will be seen that laws can ensure our freedom just as stoplights and limitations on speed and parking can facilitate the free movement of vehicles in a large city. Structure is like a roadmap that guides us through the network of choice. Identifying and cultivating values can empower us to transfer control from the inner back to the outer plane, only this time we will be in the driver's seat.

Now, after gaining insight into our

etiology, its resulting dilemma and necessary antidote, how do we navigate through the fog of valuation? Insight into what we need and desire for satisfaction and nourishment may inspire us to take the appropriate action towards fulfillment. A few days ago while working with a client, he paused at a moment of poignancy, looked up with "Aha!" gleaming in his eyes and exclaimed, "Values come from the heart!" And I later ruminated, "What good is survival (to which responsible behavior lends itself) if not to enable the experience of love?" Moreover what are morals and values but conditions provided to ensure the visitation and residence of Eros, the god of love, in the human heart? When we tell the truth, for example, does it not create trust and safety which in turn facilitate the giving and receiving of love?

If the function of the human heart, besides pumping blood, is to experience love, then a value system must be inherent in every human being. The next steps are to unveil this system and redress it with the garments of power and freedom: a starting point is behavior observance. Jung's dynamic concept of value shows certain ideas or feelings exerting greater influence upon the individual who then extends more "psychic energy" seeking them out. This energy is measurable in time, effort, money, etc. and in less conscious values, by frequency of dreams.

Then, by studying how self-identification with what we value most can lead to the main roles we play in life, the question arises: do these roles diminish our ability to realize other parts of our personality and do we choose to be limited in this way? This leads to the consideration of how our choices are conditioned by our own limitations and limited by our condition.

Horace Holley suggests that Shakespeare owes his supremacy in literature as much to the limitations of human experience as to his own excellence. He writes, "But with the decay of personal experience, the very power of estimating values passes away. We expect nothing beyond Shakespeare, because we stand within the superficial completeness of the work and not within the profound incompleteness of the man."⁽²⁾ To consider the latter would help us maintain a clearer perspective of what might be possible if. . .

Perhaps herein lies the key to the discovery of our worth and potential. We can be

blown away by our own rigid standards of excellence. But sometimes doing nothing is more valuable than doing a lot. Accepting our incompleteness frees us from bondage to perfection, which paradoxically enables us to see farther into our wholeness. This compassion for self breaks the vicious cycle of self-criticism, self-hate, depression and impotence. In the new space created for an increasingly brighter experience of self, our power for estimating values expands. The organic and non-violent process of constant becoming through self-awareness supplies a reservoir of strength and resources for constructing a larger and longer-lasting framework of esthetic, noetic, ethical or religious values from which we can affirm our worth and positively direct our lives.

This is the central quest of which "spiritual existentialist" psychologists like Rollo May and Victor Frankl have written.

The words "morality," "ethics" and "religion" are not popular these days. Images of finger-pointing judges, coercion, pompous, self-righteous hypocrites and even slithering snakes are conjured up at their mention. Deciding on moral issues has never been an easy task. Moses told the story of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the bitter fruits that that decision bore. Hiroshima wasn't easy either, but proved again that when in doubt, human beings usually "go for it." A genuine desire for freedom along with a little lust for power may have influenced both choices.

But with the "new paradigm" of wholism and multiple rightnesses gaining momentum, the process of valuation may flow more and agonize less. The moral tyranny of either/or decisions will decline as values which enhance the conscious goals of unity and integration become easier to choose. As the new age dawns, "by their fruits ye shall know them," may bear fresh meaning. Our value systems can be viewed as experimental orchards where various trees are planted, transplanted, pruned and fertilized. In lives oriented more towards process than material products, values themselves become the fruits. For the value and meaning of products derive from process and are reapplied to future process.

Just as the fruit produces and is created by its own seed, so in therapy character and belief system are braided inexorably

ly together. To transcend their limits both seed and system must encounter magic in their milieu of earth or therapeutic process. According to philosopher Dane Rudhyar(3) "seed ideas" are needed to serve as a solid and steadying background for "seed" men and women to carry forward the best of the age now finishing into the new one being built.

The modern psychotherapist with human heart (built for love) and inherent value system can furnish this seminal function. Inhabiting the shamanic realm between doctor and priest, familiar with the science/art of process (including his or her own), the therapist's very presence and involvement with the client can be talismanic whether values are verbalized or simply demonstrated through character. Mindfully the therapist will provide a sound, secure and fertile environment within which the magic of metamorphosis will transform not only limiting beliefs into expansive ones but also belief systems into value systems. This energy of new growth will cause passivity to give way to empowerment and purpose.

The process of "coming to be powerful" through valuation depends on a new consciousness integrating intuition (the heart's desire for love) and reason (the mind's prowess and ability to control it). If the feminine

aspect, the gardener of intuition, is consulted first then the male power can act from the heart as well as the head, and future generations can be assured of learning, if not our values, at least the process and art of valuation.

Once we human beings become truly effective at transforming survival from a ghastly (or ghostly) business into a joyful process, then shall we be free to experience the high peaks of love to which survival is only the foothill. From this high vantage point we may witness that true freedom is in servitude--to the nobility of the human spirit.

So when the next social season provides the perfect dinner party for you to "show your stuff," instead of relying on your dexterity with chopsticks and tofu to entertain your friends, remember to "come to be powerful," then stand up and be counted.

REFERENCES

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