Humanistic Psychology and Education

Based on an interview with Dr. W.R. Coulson, Don Closson discusses the damaging effects of humanistic psychology and the non-directive approach to drug and sex ed programs that it encourages.

Interview with Dr. Coulson

I recently had the opportunity to interview Dr. W. R. Coulson concerning the role that humanistic psychology is playing in education. Dr. Coulson was a long-time associate of Carl Rogers, who is considered to be the father of non-directive therapy, a therapy which has now been incorporated into self-esteem, sex-ed, and drug-ed curricula.

Dr. Coulson saw that this form of therapy had some success with mentally distressed people who knew they needed help, but following failures with locked-ward schizophrenics, normal adults, and a parochial school system in California, Dr. Coulson broke with Carl Rogers and is now trying to undo the damage of what might be called humanistic education.

The results of non-directive therapy in education have been disappointing to anyone willing to look at the facts. We asked Dr. Coulson about these negative results. He said:

> *Every major study of [non-directive therapy in education] over the last 15 years . . . has shown that it produces an opposite effect to what anybody wants. There are packaged curricula all over the country with names like "Quest," "Skills For Living," "Skills for Adolescents," "Here's Looking at You 2000," "Omnibudsmen," "Meology," and "Growing Healthy." Every one of them gets the same effect, and that is that they introduce good kids to misconduct, and they do it*

> *in the name of non-judgmentalism. They say, "We're not going to call anything wrong, we're not going to call drug use wrong, because we'll make some of the kids in this classroom feel bad because they are already using drugs. Let's see if we can help people without identifying for them what they're doing wrong." What happens is that the kids who are always looking for the objective standard so that they can meet it . . . are left without [one].*

> *We've trained [our children] to respect legitimate authority, and now the school is exercising its authority to say, "You've got to forget about what your church taught you or what your parents taught you; forget about that business about absolutes and right and wrong. Let's put those words in quotation marks— "right" and "wrong"—and let's help you find what you really deeply inside of you want."*

> *We've got youngsters here now who . . . are under the authority of the school [and] are being persuaded that there is a better way. And that way is to make their own decisions. They're being induced to make decisions about activities that the citizenry of the state have decided are wrong—drug use and teenage sex.*

Abraham Maslow

My interview with Dr. W. R. Coulson next focused on the work of Abraham Maslow. Dr. Maslow constructed a theory of self-actualization that described how adults reach peak levels of performance. Much of modern educational practice assumes that Maslow's theories apply to children.

I asked Dr. Coulson, who worked with Maslow, about this connection between the theory of self-actualization and education in our public schools. He responded:

> *Abe Maslow, who invented this thing, said it never applied to the population at large, and most definitely not to children. Anybody who wants to check up on my claim that Abe Maslow did a complete turnabout need only look at the second edition of his classic text called Motivation and Personality. He wrote a very lengthy preface . . . [in] an attempt to say that his followers had completely misused what he had written and that it was going to be applied to exploiting children.*

> *Writing in the late 60s, in his personal journals which were published after his death, Maslow said that this is the first generation of young people who have had their own purchasing power, and he feared that his theories of self-actualization and need fulfillment (that famous pyramid, Maslow's hierarchy of needs) would be used to steal little kids' money and virtue. . . . In the new preface he writes, "It does not apply to children; they are not mature enough; they have not had enough experience to understand tragedy, for example, nor do they have enough courage to be openly virtuous."*

Our children tend to be somewhat intimidated by their virtue because every other example they are getting, from the secular media, etc., is something very different from virtue.

> *As a good kid himself, growing up in a Jewish household, Abe Maslow knew that he tended to hang back in assertiveness. The good kids, I'm afraid, sometimes do that, and he saw everything thrown out of balance when the class was opened up to the kids to teach one another. His fear was in anticipation of the research results, which is that when you teach the teacher not to teach anymore but to become a facilitator, and you turn the chairs into a circle, and you say to the kids, in effect, "What would you like to talk about?"—the troubled kids begin to teach the good kids. The experienced kids, the kids who are doing drugs and having sex, teach the good kids that they are insufficiently*

actualized.

Education has adopted its view of moral and intellectual development from Dr. Maslow, an atheist who argued his views shouldn't be applied to children. The results are exactly what he predicted: our children are being exploited both economically, by tobacco and beer companies, and sexually by the Playboy mentality.

Self-Esteem

Parents are awakening to the disturbing fact that many educators see their children as mentally or emotionally in need of therapy. What is their illness? Low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is now named as the cause for everything from low grades to drug abuse. The solution being offered is to teach children how to acquire a healthy self-esteem.

Programs have been implemented for developing self-esteem at every grade level. DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) and Pumsy are two of the most popular elementary-school curricula. Most senior high drug-ed and sex-ed programs focus on self-esteem as well.

I asked Dr. Coulson about the use of these programs, and how parents should react to their children's placement in them. He said:

> *I would raise a red flag . . . every time the word values is used. That's been a difficult word, because for a long time Christians were asking for value-oriented education. The problem is that values has become a relativistic word—it's subjective.*
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> *In California we taught people going through our encounter groups to say, "Well, you have your values, but who's to say your values should be my values?" We taught mothers and*

fathers to fear that they were selfish if they imposed their values on their children. There are children now who have become sufficiently sophisticated in this mock psychological wave that they can say to their parents, "We appreciate your value of church-going, it just doesn't happen to be mine. My experience is other than your experience. After all, Mom and Dad, you did grow up in a different era."

We've taught our children to be clumsy developmental psychologists who are capable of accusing their parents of wanting to oppress them by teaching them the truth. So what we have to do is turn the questions back to those who offer these curricula, like the people who wrote the DUSO curriculum or the Pumsy curriculum, and say, "Is this curriculum just your value? And if so, why should it be our value? Or is your curriculum somehow true? Do you claim to have knowledge in some way of the way things should be everywhere? Do you think you have a grip on a universal [truth], and, if you can grant that you do, can you not grant that we might, and that there might be some kind of competition between our understanding of what our universal obligations are in this world and your own understanding; that there is some kind of universal or absolute that we are seeking?"

Because, in fact, they don't think that their values are relativistic. They think that everybody ought to be doing this. And that's precisely their error. I'm a non-directive psychotherapist, and if I were doing therapy, I would still be doing it like Carl Rogers, my teacher, taught me to do it. But I would not be doing it in classrooms, and I would not be doing it with people who could not profit from it. DUSO is an example of a method that's been taken out of the counseling room and into the classroom, and they're giving everybody medicine that's appropriate for a few.

Cooperative Education

Another important topic is the growing popularity of cooperative education programs, programs which place students into groups and allow them to use their own skills of critical thinking to arrive at conclusions about various issues.

Dr. Coulson observed:

> *Cooperative learning just strikes me as another one of those ways to prevent mothers and fathers and their agents, the public schools and private schools, from teaching effectively what is right and wrong to their children. In a cooperative class the questions are put to the kids, and once again we're going to find that the impaired children are going to wind up being the teachers of the unimpaired, because the unimpaired tend to have in them somewhat the fear of the Lord. They do not want to give offense, and the other kids don't care. . . . They'll go ahead and say whatever is on their minds.*

> *Research, for example, from the American Cancer Society shows that teenage girls who smoke are far more effective in these classroom discussions than teenage girls who don't smoke, because the teenage girls who smoke have outgoing personalities, party- types. Just let them take over the class and they really will; they'll run with the ball. And so again, the outcome of this kind of education is always the reverse of what anybody wants.*

Central to virtually all of these programs is teaching children a method of decision-making. We asked Dr. Coulson to comment on these decision-making skills.

> *They teach what the moral philosophers call "consequentialism" as though the only morality is, "How's it going to work out?" They teach the children a method that they call "decision-making." Typically, there are Five Steps.*

> *Quest is a good example: In the First Step you identify the problem with killing someone for somebody for financial gain. The Second Step is to consider the alternatives. Immediately the Christian, the Jewish, the Muslim, or the God-fearing kid is at a disadvantage because he doesn't think there is an alternative. The only answer is "No!" It's an absolute "never"—"Thou shalt not kill." But the school says, "No, you can't be a decision-maker, a self-actualizing person, without looking at the alternatives."*

> *The Third Step is to predict the consequences of each alternative. We know that teenagers particularly feel invulnerable. They think . . . those things adults warn them are going to happen if they misbehave won't happen, and adults are going to try to fool them and keep them under control for their own convenience. The Fourth Step is to make the decision and act upon it. The Fifth Step is . . . to make an evaluation of the outcome, and, if you don't like the outcome, then try again. And I say there are kids who have never gotten to Step Five because Step Four killed them. There are kids who have literally died from making a wrong decision in Step Four or gone into unconsciousness, and there is no possibility of evaluation.*

The Religious Nature of Humanistic Education

Why would educators implement a curriculum so damaging to what we as Christian parents want for our children? We must consider the religious assumptions held by those who created the theoretical foundations for these programs.

Schools have argued that self-esteem programs are fulfilling parental demands for values education without violating the so- called strict separation of church and state. In other words, they claim that programs such as Pumsy and DUSO are

religiously neutral.

As we will hear from Dr. Coulson, the men who originated the theories behind these programs felt it their mission to influence others to see things through their particular worldview.

I asked Dr. Coulson to address the religious nature of humanistic education. He responded:

> *There are four major streams of influence on what I grew up calling humanistic education. . . . Today these influences remain. They are (1) Abe Maslow's work with self-actualization and hierarchy of needs; (2) Carl Rogers's work with non-directive classrooms based on his model of psychotherapy; (3) the work of Lewis Rath and his students—Sidney Simon, Howard Kirshenbaum, Merrill Harmon—called values clarification; (4) the work of Lawrence Kohlberg.*
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> *All of these men independently attribute their fundamental insight to John Dewey. In 1934 John Dewey wrote a book called The Common Faith. John Dewey wanted a religion which could be held in common by everybody in America, and, in order for that to happen, it had to be a religion which excluded God. He called it religious humanism—that was Dewey's term for it, not my term.*
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> *Carl Rogers and Abe Maslow admitted to being religious humanists. Carl was from a fundamentalist, Protestant home; Abe was reared in a Jewish home, a somewhat observant home. Both of them got the religion of Dewey. Rogers was a student at Columbia when Dewey was in his Senate seat in the twenties, and Maslow was a doctoral fellow in the next decade. Maslow said in his journals, of the churchgoers, "They're not religious enough for me." And Rogers said to Richard Evans, "I'm too religious to be religious." What*

> *these men meant was, "I'm more religious than you are if you affirm a creed and if you go to church. I'm so religious I don't go to church."*

Dr. Coulson went on to state that there is a fundamental incompatibility between Christianity and these programs. The two belief systems begin with different views of man and God.

As parents, we need to know what kind of therapy is being used on our children. If your child is receiving self-esteem training or non-directive therapy, he or she is losing time needed to become academically competent. That alone constitutes educational malpractice. But even more frightening is the possibility that your child's faith in the God of Scripture is being replaced with John Dewey's religious humanism.

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