On September 4, 2020 8:53:59 PM PDT, Eric Charles <[eric.phillip.charles@gmail.com](mailto:eric.phillip.charles@gmail.com) wrote:

This is mostly for Nick, but copying Jon and Glen as well, as it may

interest them. It is from Holt, 1915. This section covers the function

of language, and how that relates to the aspects of the environment of

which one's behavior is a function. Relative to our discussion today,

it acknowledges both the arbitrary and non-arbitrary aspects of

language use.

There is another issue I'd like to bring in, that will require taking

a section before this excerpt and connecting it to a section that comes

later... I'm still working out the best way to present that, hence why

this is "#1".)

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An interesting problem of a partially conflict-

ing sensory pattern is 'the Meynert scheme' of

the child and the candle-flame, which has become

generally familiar owing to its having been quoted

by James.♦ Mejmert aims to show by a diagram

how a child learns not to put his finger into a

candle-flame. Two original reflexes are assumed:

one in which the visual image of the candle causes

the child's finger to go out to touch the flame ; the

other in which the painful heat on the finger causes

the child's arm to be withdrawn. A fanciful series

of nerve-paths, fabricated in the interests of the

'association theory,' purports to show why after

once burning himself the child will in future put

out his hand, on seeing a candle, but draw it back

again before he burns himself. The explanation

is beautifully accomplished by begging the whole

♦The Principles of Psychology." New York, 1890,

Vol. I, pp. 24-7.

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question; that is, by resting the 'explanation' on

certain time (and strength) relations between the

two reflexes of extension and retraction — relations

which neither diagram nor text accounts for. In

fact, apart from the passage in which the whole

question is begged, both diagram and text show

that on every subsequent occasion the child will

infallibly put out his hand, burn it, and then with-

draw it, just as he had done the first time; for

the reflex path for extending the hand is the

shorter and the better established of the two,

and it remains entirely vague as to how the im-

pulse to withdraw shall arrive in time to save the

hand.

But Meynert's explanation is not only unsuc-

cessful, it is wrong in its intent. If achieved, it

would show that a child once burned will on merely

seeing a candle, and before it feels the candle's heat,

draw back its hand. And this, Meynert thinks, is the

process of learning.... So far

from being a step in learning, such a reaction will

gravely impede the child in acquiring the use of

this innocent utensil...

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...

The normal process of learning to deal with a

candle is the process of establishing a response to

an object which is both luminous and hot, if we

consider only the two properties so far brought in

question. The successful response will be one which

is controlled directly by the actual properties of

the candle, for this alone means precision and

nicety in handling it...

--------- 30-ish pages later -------

An innate tendency or purpose of an infant is to

put out its hand to touch fire. If the mother is by,

she holds back the hand {her purpose) before it

reaches the flame. There is a hint for the child,

here, of right and wrong. If the mother guards the

child unremittingly, and every time restrains the

hand before the uncomfortable warmth begins to

stimulate the child's own tendency to withdraw, the

child will never be burned and may eventually (in a

way to be described) acquire the habit of stopping

short before reaching the flame. But this cautious

conduct will not be guided by (be a function of) the

heat of the flame, for the child has had no experi-

ence of this. The child's general conduct toward

fire will then be partly a function of the immediate

properties of fire (its color, position, shape, etc.);

but partly also of a something else (really its

mother), which may or may not figure explicitly

in the child's field of consciousness. The mother

has set a barrier between the child and a portion

of reality; and forever after the child will be in

some measure impeded in its dealings with fire. An

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inhibition of which the source or sanction is thus

not intrinsic is precisely, I suppose, a tabu.

Or again, if an equally unremitting mother lets

the child put out its hand toward the flame and

takes care only that the hand by too great momen-

tum or an accidental lurch does not actually come

into the flame, the child will not be burned and

its own mechanism of withdrawal will be exercised

not through the mother's interference but through

the direct action of the flame's heat. The child's

conduct toward fire becomes integrated, and is

solely a function of the actual properties of fire.

Ten years later you shall hear the first mother

shouting, "Bobbie, don't you dare put your hand

so near the lamp, and if you touch those matches

again your father will whip you." And the second

mother will be saying, "Bobbie, go get the matches

now and light the lamp, and set it down on the

center-table."

Here the reader may feel that I egregiously beg

the question by a couple of cheap improvisations.

Let us see: for here we come to the most essential

point in Freud. The first mother has pushed back

the child's hand before the child's own mechanism

of withdrawal was stimulated (by the heat). The

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child is frustrated, but not instructed; and it is in

the situation where, later on in life, we say to our-

selves, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try

again!" The child tries and tries again, and

mother is kept busy. This effectively exercises the

child's tendency to move toward the flame, and

leaves undeveloped its equally inborn tendency to

withdraw from heat. In short, the mother is actu-

ally ingraining the very tendency which she wishes

to curb. Why, then, does her method seem to her

to produce caution in the child? Because if she

perseveres for a year or so (as she will), the child

matures and can respond to a more complicated

situation, which is flame-and-mother in constella-

tion. This conjunction it directly experiences, and

it learns that when mother is around it can't touch

fire. Unfortunately, however, this is for him an

intrinsic property of mother, and not of fire.

There is the evil. Yet this is a genuine quality of

the mother, and the child learns this without tabu,

so that when mother and flame are together it

perceives the situation where flame cannot be

touched. And now, if the mother has not suc-

cumbed to worry meanwhile, she is gratified at hav-

ing 'taught' the child caution. In reality she has

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done only this:—she has deepened by habit the

tendency to reach out toward flame, has left unex-

ercised the conservative tendency to withdraw from

heat, has waited for the child to grow up sufficiently

to learn that the non-touchability of flame is a

property of herself, has worried herself into a nag-

ging mother, and has prematurely got the child to

respond to herself as an object of the environment,

with qualities of her own and needing suitably to be

studied and dealt with. What is worst of all, if

she is spared to continue her misguided watchful-

ness until the youth's plastic period is passed, he

will have such an insatiable tendency to play with

fire, in her absence, that no amount of actual burns

will ever correct it.

All this is a paradigm of Freudian morals. In

order to introduce some convenient terms, I will

put the matter more technically. The mother's

hand that stays the child's hand before the child's

innate tendency to withdraw from heat has been

stimulated is a barrier between the child and the

flame. To this barrier, the mother's hand, the

child has already acquired various modes of re-

sponse; it now acquires another, to draw back from

the mother's hand-in-front-of-flame, just as it

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learns to halt before a high fence. The mother's

hand 'suppresses' the child's innate tendency to

touch the fire. But the child's withdrawal becomes

a withdrawal from the mother's hand and not, as it

ought to be, a response to (or function of) the

flame itself. Freud, like others before him, calls

this 'dissociation'; The precautionary response

which should be 'associated' with fire is dissociated

therefrom, and transferred to something else; in

our case to the mother. Take this mother away,

and the child knows no caution with regard to fire.

All responses to the mother become integrated into

a group or 'complex,' and those toward flame into

another complex. The two complexes are not en-

tirely out of relation to each other, yet each has

more internal cohesiveness than it has cohesion with

the other complex.... And

let us note also that if there is any question here

of right and wrong conduct on the part of the child

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it rests solely on the fact that fire burns; and

further, that the misguided mother has undertaken

to arrogate to herself this bit of what should be her

child's experience, to transfer the role of truth to

her own person. She has not trusted the truth.

The other mother was equally tender, and far

wiser. She saw to it that no accidental lurch or fall

brought her child's hand into the flame. But she

let the child follow its own bent of reaching toward

the flame until its own other tendency to avoid heat

was stimulated and exercised by the direct fact of

heat in the flame. Her child will not be actually

burned any more than the other. By thus trust-

ing the truth it takes about two days to establish

in a normal child cautious conduct with regard to

fire.

... five years later [the boy] encounters tobacco.

Here the disastrous consequences (in part stunted

growth) are so serious, so deferred, and so irre-

mediable that the boy can by no means be allowed

to make the trial for himself. A question of morals

is going to arise; and let us again be quite clear at

the outset that, whatever complications may come

up, the ultimate sanction for the 'right' course of

action in this regard will be nothing but the *fact*

that tobacco does injure growing lads. The father

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explains to the boy the injurious action of tobacco,

and that therefore it will be 'not right' for him

to use tobacco until he has attained his full growth;

after which time the effect of tobacco will be some-

what different and the lad will then decide the mat-

ter for himself. Here I assume the effective use of

written and spoken 'signs.' The mechanism of

signs is as yet but little understood, and it is not

a thing to be merely speculated on. What is cer-

tain is that in the course of integration outer ob-

jects come to be responded to by specific gestures

and modulations of the voice---responses which

have a purely social significance; that these re-

sponses become somehow integrated with the other,

more practical, responses to the same objects, re-

spectively; and that, as a result, such signs uttered

by one person and perceived by another serve to

touch off, or indeed to organize, the same responses

in the second person as would have been touched off

or organized in the latter if he had had the same

experience with the objects signified as the first

person has had. It is a marvelous function and

one that is susceptible of grave derangements.

The situation before us needs analysis. In the

first place, tobacco appeals to no authentic appetite

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of the boy, in the sense above described. But it is

an object of the environment, and at the stage of

development now in question it evokes complicated

specific responses of a sort which we somewhat

loosely call curiosity and imitation. I believe that

it cannot be said with certainty whether such re-

sponses do or do not derive additional impetus from

the basic appetites. In any case it will be not far

wrong to consider the tendency of a boy to investi-

gate the possibilities of tobacco and to imitate the

use which others make of it, as being like the tend-

ency which he possessed as a baby to put out his

hand toward fire. After the

talk with his father

two tendencies in the boy are stimulated: on the one

hand are the former tendencies of curiosity and

imitation; and on the other, his father's words "to-

bacco will injure you" and "it is *not right* for you

to use it." (I pass over the possibility that the

father has said, "I will punish you if you touch

tobacco"; for this would reduce the case to pre-

cisely the type already considered... ) The boy

now faces a *dilemma*; and clearly a moral problem.

It is possible to view this as an issue between

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'abstract' right and wrong, that is, to view the

moral sanction involved as in some manner cate-

gorical. This would be, I think, to commit the

fallacy of over-abstraction; and one notes that

the systems of ethics which posit an *abstract* sanc-

tion for right conduct, never discover *what* 'right'

is. In this way, pathetically enough, the upshot of

academic ethics is merely a very learned interroga-

tion point. We shall revert to this matter of

morals *von oben herab* [from the top down]. In any case such an ab-

stract position would not be the Freudian ; and the

inferable Freudian ethics is distinctly one *von*

*unten hinauf* [from the bottom up]; as follows.

If the boy has hitherto found in his father a

truth-telling man, the father's talk will have con-

veyed to the boy, not a 'father *says*,' but a 'to-

bacco *is*' (injurious). This item will then take its

place as an integral part of the complex named

tobacco. Language will have served its proper

task, and there will be no dissociation, or transfer

of 'injuriousness' from 'tobacco' to 'father.'

The boy may still dabble with tobacco, but the first

step at least is accomplished. And this step is in-

dispensable, for if the lad is to benefit by the experi-

ence of others rather than experience the bitter

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truth for himself, there must be some source of in-

formation which shall be to the boy *fact* and not

mere asseveration...

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... This I prefer to describe...

on the assumption that the father is

known by his son to be a truth-teller. And let us

not forget that a truth-telling father, like a hypo-

critical father, is as much an object of the child's

environment as a thermometer, a clock, a seismo-

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graph, or an encyclopedia. And specific modes of

response toward him are established by the same

integrative mechanism.

-------- around 20 pages later ---------

... if ill conduct

arises through ignorance, the prevalence of such

conduct is no mystery. In the bewildering turmoil

which we witness where the sentiments and aims of

individuals, of nations, and of races conflict with

one another, we find an inexhaustible variety of

contradictory appearances. These give rise to in-

numerable shortsighted and contradictory opinions

both in the individual and in the collective mind.

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**And when these become crystallized in social con-**

**vention, in the tenets and admonitions of the**

**church, or in legislative enactments of the state,**

**they constitute a bar to the progress of *discrimina-***

***tion*, an official ban (like primitive tabu) making**

**for *suppression*. Thus it comes to pass that**

**church and state often play in the adult's expe-**

**rience the role of shortsighted and injudicious**

**parents. And these institutions, like the parent,**

**find it advantageous to allege a moral sanction**

**'from above' which authorizes them to impose their**

**will on society.** A little insight into the actual

workings of church and state shows how easily this

allegation, untrue in the first instance, turns into

an impudent piece of cajolery. It is truth and

the ever-progressive discrimination of truth which

alone conduce to moral conduct. ...

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....

That is ethics 'from below.' The ethics 'from

above' are a very different story. There Someone

exhorts or obliges us to suppress our wishes, and

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if we observe Someone a bit carefully we shall all

too often find that he generously busies himself

with suppressing the facts. Ethics from above

come indeed from above, from the man or the insti-

tution 'higher up.' And for this there is a very

frail and human reason, which no one need go very

far to discover. According to the ethics from

below, the unassuming ethics of the dust, facts are

the sole moral sanction: and facts impose the most

inexorable moral penalties.

Glen to Eric

Interesting. FWIW, I much prefer the [non]arbitrary distinction to the [epi]phenomenal one. And Holt's identification of the kid's judgement of 'truth-telling' is both fraught and spot-on. Whatever accidents have been frozen into the kid's development up to that point constrain the kid's ability to 'read through' the signs of the dad to their referents.

Eric to Glen

Glen,

Yup. Connecting this back with our discussion from Friday more explicitly.... The various mouth-flap sounds are arbitrary, the issue of whether the child comes to behaves correctly towards the indicated dangers of the world isn't "arbitrary", it is developmentally constrained.

Glen to Eric

***"Thus it comes to pass that church and state often play in the adult's experience the role of shortsighted and injudicious parents. And these institutions, like the parent, find it advantageous to allege a moral sanction 'from above' which authorizes them to impose their will on society."***

Well, as I've argued ad nauseum, the RATE of processes matters. If society sees that some very slow 'flame', e.g. lung cancer, cannot teach the kid directly because it takes a lifetime for the bad effects to arise, then it is NOT analogous to the short-sighted parent. And that's a too-large-scope over time. There are also too-large-scopes over space (or connective networks), e.g. hazardous waste. Much of what short-sighted individualists gloss over lies in failing to consider[ing] the RATES of various processes. What may seem arbitrary, may show itself non-arbitrary in the larger scope.

Also, I didn't complain that you presented unelaborate 1st expressions. I complained that your 1st expressions are FALSE in their abstraction, that your attempts to be a shock-jock prevents reasonable people from hearing what you mean. The subsequent (2nd or 3rd iterations) rationalizations do a better, more concrete, job of describing reality.

Eric to Glen

Accidentally sent this only to Glen at 1 in the morning, resending to everyone. Hopefully he will forward his reply.

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Well, the need to deal with the "rate" issue is why Holt brings up the problem with the tobacco. (There were other examples between the fire and the tobacco, and between the tobacco and politics, but I think they highlight different issues.) In the tobacco example, recall, it mattered whether the Father was known to be a truth teller, because *that*would determine whether the child developed a habit directed towards the actual properties of tobacco or towards the parent. The words of the father, and the past experience with the father, substitute - developmentally - for the role of the truth-trusting mother, who allowed her child's hand to get close enough to the fire to feel the heat and withdraw naturally. Both create a child with behavior directed towards the relevant aspects of the world.

We should also bring into the discussion the situations you alluded to Friday, where there might be an initial decision (e.g., which side of the road to drive on), but after that decision is made it is non-arbitrary that the decision must be enforced (or lots of people will die in accidents). Holt didn't deal with that issue, but I assume he would agree with you regarding them.

So we have at least four situations:

1) Situations where we can trust the normal developmental process will lead someone to learn the truth of the situation on their own, perhaps with a bit of outside guardianship helping the learner avoid the biggest pitfalls that might happen before learning has occurred. Parents (friends, teachers, etc.) in these situations might or might not allow the "normal" process to play out, but the point is that in these situations they *could*do so, with no risk to the learner.

2) Situations where the truth is entirely non-arbitrary, but the normal developmental process cannot be trusted, because the dangers are too delayed or too severe to let someone experience for themselves. There we have no choice but to hope that words will work. And the success or failure of that will be dependent on all sorts of past history regarding mouth-flap sounds and the relationship of the individuals involved. And in these situations we must be careful to distinguish the learner's behavior becoming a function of the truth about the world (e.g., the danger tobacco poses) vs. the learner's behavior becoming a function of the individual doing the "teaching" (e.g., the danger of using tobacco when in front of the teacher). And once someone has embodied the latter, it is a difficult thing to undo.

3) Situations like 1 or 2, with some arbitrariness about what is right or wrong, but without ambiguity after that. For example, someone might well learn which side of a hallway to walk on without needing verbal instruction, but we would want verbal guidance to ensure someone knew to drive on the right in the U.S., and on the left in the U.K.

4) Situations where the truth of the matter really has nothing to do with it, and we are just talking social conformity. For example, belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the idea that one must not wear white after labor day. Note that one might experience various social disadvantages by not wearing white after labor day, but there is *something*different about that than about driving on the correct side of the road. 

When Holt criticizes the "from above" institutions, I don't think he has in mind #4, which is where many critics of church and authoritarian state focus their efforts. I think he has in mind #1. Note that he specifically asserts that those institutions *often*play the part of the "short-sighted and injudicious parent", which is a character from the learning-about-fire example (hence my connection of those two sections, without the stuff in the middle). He is saying that in instituting laws and taboos, the top-down *institutions*often stop the normal development of discriminatory action. The people under their influence might indeed not-engage in certain prohibited behaviors, but the lack of engagement would be *about*the church, and not about the actual danger those behaviors might pose. And this creates all the problems and complexes in future life that are the over-protective mother risks creating relative to the child's behavior towards fire. It creates people for whom the truth of the situation is irrelevant, because their behavior is primarily about appeasement of the authority.

I feel like I should take that last bit at least a few steps further, but I am worried that I am too tired to do that clearly, so I will stop... but I hope you can all, at least vaguely, see the types of implications I am trying to reach towards. So much as is feasible, development is benefitted by staying with #1, because that is where the behavior of the individual most directly becomes a function of the crucial aspects of the world, whatever those may be. And the experiments in education by Dewey, Montissori, and the like can be understood, in part, as efforts to put all sorts of things into #1 that others assume must be in #2, or worse #4.

On 9/7/20 7:43 AM, uǝlƃ ↙↙↙ wrote:

I'm glad you sent this only to me. I don't intend to hijack the conversation. I don't have anything to argue about in your main point [†] [†] To restate what I hear you saying: A prohibition or other type of constraint on an individual's learning/understanding methods can misattribute the focus/attention of the individual, misattribute \*from\* the true/actual/meaningful source (the referent) \*to\* the machinery used to prohibit/constrain. The misattribution resulting from top-down prohibitions/constraints is exploitable (the imposition of "will" on society). Therefore, it is important to draw as crisp a line as possible and put as much as we \*can\* in category/situation (1).

But first I have to at least try to restate the situations:

1) wild-type individual development is usually adequate.

2) wild-type individual development is often inadequate.

3) (1) and (2) with less universality (more variation across different contexts).

4) diminished, weakened, or abstracted consequences for nonconformity. If I've got at least those categories near-parroted, then here's my issue. In this set-up, we're assuming there is a fairly crisp line between an individual and a collective. I think a strong argument can (and has been) made that there is no such thing as individual development. (Helen Keller stories.) But even weaker forms put a kink in this set-up. The short-sighted parent \*is\* a critical part of individual development. All parents are short-sighted. The misdirection we get from 'from above' institutions are \*necessary\* for individual development. And every scale between the two is just as integral, just as primary.

If that's the case, then there is no such thing as (1). And trying to place things in (1) is the same \*error\* you (or Holt) accuses the 'from above' institutions of. To handle this objection, to steelman the set-up, we can add to it the consideration of scope (of which rate is a sub-type). So, when talking about smoking stunting one's growth versus smoking causing lung cancer, we can set a scope for the agents as well as a scope for the harm. I'd argue the scopes are different for growth stunting versus lung cancer. And the scopes for learning the two are also different. The harm scope for growth stunting is roughly parent-child-mates-grandchild. The harm scope for lung cancer is larger, parent-child-mates-grandchild-healthcare-productivity. E.g. the consequences to the world of being a bit small are smaller than the consequences of getting, and then getting treatment for, lung cancer. Likewise \*learning\* these things requires different methods, different attention, different societal structures.

I can make such distinctions all throughout whatever example situations we come up with. And some attempt to treat scopes/rates \*normalizes\* these distinctions and is necessary to make this set-up work beyond some hypothetical/theoretical abstraction.

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Glen,

Thank you for the reply. I'd like to try to develop this some more.... it feels productive.

Commenting on your proposed categories, I will elaborate on the first two, and suggest that we might be talking at cross purposes regarding the latter two. (I know inserting the word "natural" below is not quite right, but I can't figure out something better at the moment, and I think the meaning will be clear.)

1) wild-type individual development is usually adequate. ***Because "natural" effects are at play which are relatively quick and are (or can be moderated to be) not overly severe (or which can be relatively easily reversed).***

2) wild-type individual development is often inadequate.  ***Because "natural" effects are at play which are distant and/or are irreversibly severe.***

3) (1) and (2) with less universality (more variation across different contexts). ***---- I'm not sure if this is what I was getting at. Any of the above can vary across contexts (if we set them up that way). I was trying to acknowledge the type of semi-arbitrariness which you had emphasized in some of the discussions (an initial arbitrariness that creates "natural" effects afterwards, such as which side of the road one drives on). Maybe that is not relevant to this discussion, and we could drop this category, but it seemed like it might be relevant, so I was trying to include it.***

4) diminished, weakened, or abstracted consequences for nonconformity.   ***---- Here I'm sure I intended to emphasize something else: the arbitrariness. Let's imagine a kid in the '50s going out to play, and being yelled at by his mother right before he starts. There is a difference worth somehow noting between the mother yelling "Don't play with that snake, it is a rattlesnake, they are dangerous!" and "Don't play with that kid, he is a colored kid, they are no good!" Yes, the rattlesnake can kill you, quickly. Yes, in contrast, playing with the black kid can lead to the less severe issue of social shunning, and the effect can be quite delayed. But the crucial difference for the point I was hoping to make is neither the delay nor the severity, it is the relationship between the mother's instructions and the truth of the situation. The rattlesnake has been incorrectly perceived as a good choice for play, and a more careful examination will reveal that the snake poses danger. If the mother is known to be truth telling, etc., etc., the child will learn something true about the rattlesnake itself, and his discriminative behavior towards snakes will be more accurate in the future. That makes the snake category 2. In contrast, the black kid has been correctly perceived as a good candidate for play, and the instructions to not play with him have nothing to do with the actual kid. If the mother is known to be truth telling, etc., etc., the child will have learned something false about the black child, and his discriminative behavior towards people will be less accurate in the future. Phrased differently: The "truth of the matter" is that no examination of the neighborhood children themselves will reveal the black kids to make worse play-candidates than the white kids. That is what I was hoping to have the 4th category distinguish.***

What am I trying to do with these categories ?

I am trying to contrast Holt's critique of institutions like church and state with those I am more used to seeing. Most critiques of the role of institutions such as the church focus on the arbitrariness of their rules, i.e., on Type 4 situations and, to a lesser extent, Type 3 situations.

* Modern Libertarians claim that the state deciding such things is "Tyranny!"
* Atheists claim that the church deciding such things is "deluding" the masses.
* The marxist-socialists point out the role of such arbitrary rules in "reproducing the hegemonic systems of oppression."
* Etc., etc.

I think it would be a mistake to interpret Holt's criticism of institutions along those lines. I think Holt understands that such arbitrariness is necessary to an extent if society is to provide the benefits that societies provide; while he certainly wouldn't have been big on discriminating against people (facing much bias himself for being homosexual), I don't think he would begrudge social norms such as not wearing white after labor, tipping your hat in certain situations, or any of that.

Holt's renders his brief critique of institutions after more than 50 pages on the role of experience in behavioral development, focusing on how people come to accurately behave as a function of behaviorally-relevant aspects of the situations they find themselves in. In that context, Holt is critiquing how institutions often come to interfere with such development, turning situations where people *could* learn about behaviorally-relevant aspects of the environment into situations where (if learning occurs at all) learning is first and foremost *about* the institutions. Just as the injudicious mother *might*produce a child whose behavior towards the flame is a function of the mother (rather than a function of the properties of the fire), injudicious institutions *might* rob the child of the opportunity to behave as a function of the relevant aspects of the world.

Among other things, (I think) Holt worries about how the injudicious systems produce people who can't tell the difference between Type 1 or 2 situations and Type 4 situations. We have all seen this (I assume), when we meet people for whom schooling was entirely about learning things relative to the instructors, not things about the world. Those people see things like "integer multiplication is commutative" as something first and foremost about what a teacher wanted them to say on a test, rather than as something about how the world works (under a wide variety of circumstances).

But further, Holt's brief critique mentions "official ban" as particularly problematic. This is because a ban on having certain experiences not only deprives us of the opportunity to individually develop in relation to the truth of the matter, it further stops society-writ-large from ever being able to verify if the institutionalized rules relate to the truth of the matter. In a world where black kids and white kids are effectively banned from playing with each other, we would never discover that they can play together perfectly fine. A system in which morality is determined by the truth of the matter, which is open to investigation, wouldn't allow such a thing to last very long; the perpetuation of such immoral rules could only (Holt asserts) survive for decades and even centuries in a system that convinced people that morality entails conformity with rules that come "from above."

Nick to Eric and Glen:

Dear Phellow Phriammers,

Eric has demanded to know why I have not pitched into the discussion of Hazard-learning and Development. Mostly I am 82 and I just cannot keep up with you guys. Do any of the rest of you know what its like to fall behind in a friam conversation??!! It’s like climbing a hill of ball bearings.

I am fighting the urge to rationalize my negligence. It does see to verge on a bicker amongst the Libertarian Faithful. It does seem like the kind of argument which would go better if we had all read Vygotsky (which I have not). I will say that Vygotsky is the origin of the notion of scaffolding by adults. The Good Mother’s behavior toward the child and the flame just seems like a perfect example of scaffolding, where one sets up the conditions for safe learning and then gets the hell out of the way. I can see why Eric, who is on the point of raising two teenagers, might have this issue in mind. I less understand where Glen is coming from.

But setting aside my anti-libertarian bias, it seems an interesting and useful conversation, to which I, for once, blessedly, do not have anything to contribute but a rectified transcript of the conversation so far.

I have added this note to the bottom of it. Why don’t you all do the same?

Nick