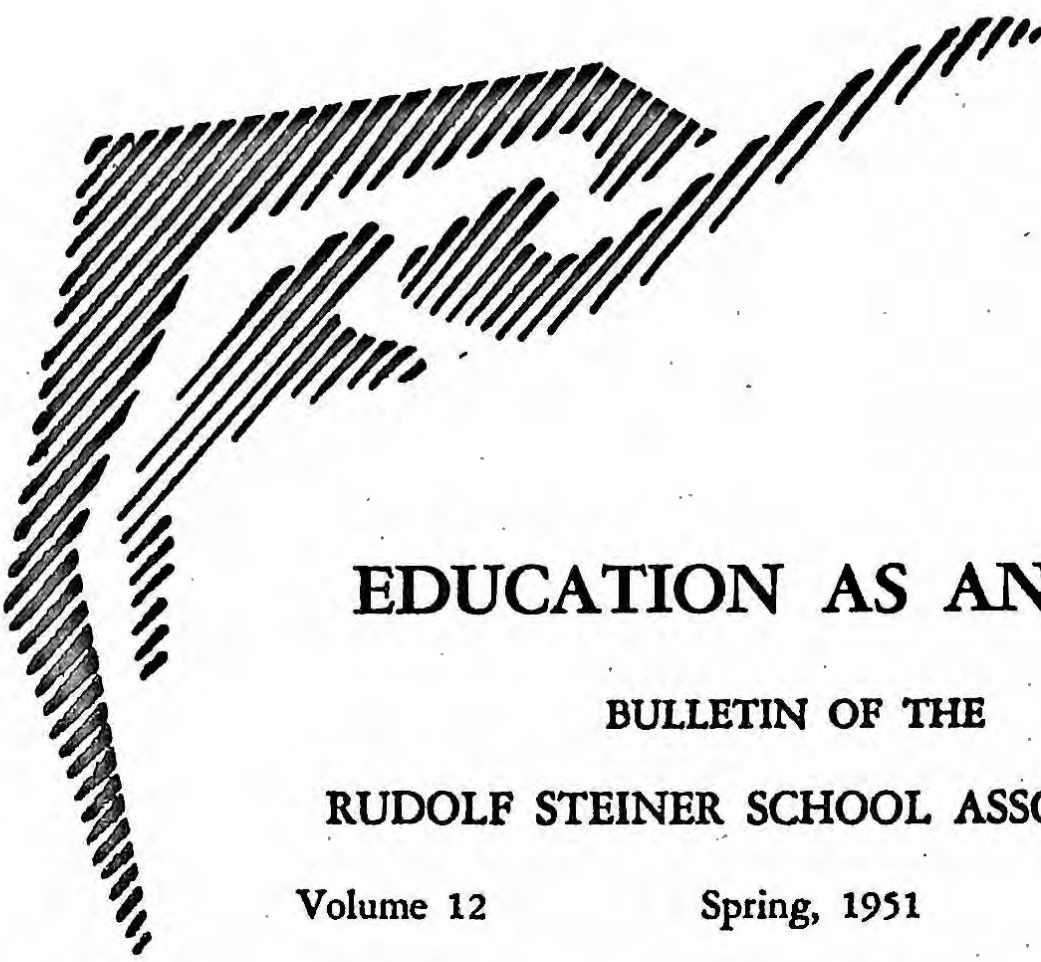




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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BORDERLANDS OF EDUCATION

by Dr. Bernard Lievegoed

This article is Part One of a longer essay. Part Two describes Disturbances Caused by Certain Tendencies of Inner Development: Retarded Development and Accelerated Development. We hope to bring this out in later issues of the Bulletin. The description of such extreme cases may serve to acquaint educators with the pattern of tendencies which are also at work, though to a far lesser degree, in normal children. Such knowledge can equip teachers and parents to recognize slight tendencies towards unbalance and enable them to help children to become more and more harmonious in their development. — The Editor.

Increasingly education has to deal with children whose development is disturbed in one way or another. Often the disturbances are very obvious and evoke such difficulties that certain measures become necessary. More frequently, however, the difficulties become apparent as indications only to be recognized by a practised eye. For this category it is of the greatest importance that the right steps be taken at an early stage.

The extreme cases show us the pattern. It is essential to determine through an early diagnosis the direction in which the therapy should work. Following a few general view points we will try to give a short synopsis of the most frequent disturbances of children's development. We will discuss first:

Disturbances Caused by Stress of Outer Circumstances

On a former occasion it has been pointed out that both the physical and mental development of a child take place according to a certain rhythm. Physically this is a rhythm between broadening or "filling-out" and lengthening or

"stretching" — between horizontal and vertical growth. Mentally it is a rhythm between expansion or dreamy unfolding and individualization or the sharpening of consciousness.

In three periods of about seven years each, the development from birth to maturity takes place. This development can be retarded in its entirety or in one of the realms of thinking, feeling or willing. The children's stage of development in such cases does not correspond with their actual age in years. If the development is entirely or partly accelerated, certain possibilities of development reach their point of completion too soon. This last process can be clarified through citing the growing process in the realm of plants.

The tendency here is one of vegetative unfolding or expansion, completed each time by an individualizing principle. This principle is the flower in the life of the plant, the individual ego in the life of man. If an annual plant grows during a moist spring, there is a strong vegetative growth; the leaves grow large, the plant develops into a substantial, bulky one, but the leaf-forms are inexact and watery. Flower formation is late.

If the spring is warm and sunny, the flowering process takes place before the vegetative one is completed. Plants are tiny with sharply formed leaves and little substance. If, right after the beginning of the flowering process, a wet period sets in, one can observe how the plant tries to make up for its poor vegetative phase without success. The transition into the later period has irrevocably stopped the former one. In plant life development takes place between earth and cosmos, soil and sun. The balance between these determines the acceleration or the retardation of every following phase.

In human life the transition from one phase to the other lies in the balance between the vegetative forces of metabolism and the powers of the individualizing ego. Both alternate rhythmically to develop the child from phase to phase.

The first years are strongly vegetative and therefore geared to the filling-out of the stature. Towards the seventh year the first individualization into the school child's stature and mental school maturity takes place alongside of the physical lengthening.

After this there comes again a more vegetative and dreamy period during which a broadening both of stature and psyche takes place. This in turn brings about a new lengthening and its accompanying individualization towards the time of puberty. Still another period of unfolding follows this and gives place to the final individualization of the child into an adult.

Considering the disturbances caused by the stress of outer circumstances, we find that severe famine retards and even stops the vegetative growth. Mental growth is hampered accordingly.

Less severe famine shows a very different picture. Hunger enhances consciousness; the dreamy, vegetative pole is weakened, the consciousness pole strengthened. The child develops like a plant in sandy soil: small and lightweight, but with an early, usually too early, flowering period. The sense life is wide awake, thinking is directed towards the concrete world too soon instead of awakening slowly towards it by way of periods during which the personality can master each newly reached level and make it its own.

Periods of undernourishment mature young people early without filling their souls with an inner content. In other words hunger creates a psychopathic generation. If a period of better nourishment follows, the body can only partly make up for the loss, and the mind especially cannot fully retrieve

the period of childlike and dreamy learning-by-play. Consequently the child lacks something for the rest of its life since a child's imaginative play provides the practice for the adult's creative powers.

As early as the years between 1930 and 1940, it struck me that the young people in Germany who were starved between 1918 and 1923, during their pre-puberty years, suffered in great numbers from disturbances of the will, from inadequacy to bring about in life what they really wanted and what their mind could so well define. The largest number of these young people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five became easy victims of National Socialism and many of those who kept out of that suffered from paralysis of the will and a neurotic attitude towards life.

Hunger creates a psychopathic generation. The intellect does not suffer; it awakes even earlier. But the deeper layers of the emotions, and especially of the moral nature, which should be engendered deep inside the unconscious will through a dreamy childlife, all these are severely damaged because their development is prematurely interrupted.

During the last war educators in our own country (Holland) were able to watch this. Changes in the children were due not only to altered surroundings but largely to total or partial undernourishment.

After the war we experienced the same thing with the children coming from Indonesian concentration camps. In all schools they showed a striking hunger for learning. In a short time large deficiencies were made up for and they belonged to the most eager of the pupils. But after a year relapses occurred everywhere. A great apathy of the will and emotional indifference made the children fall back again.

A great mistake was made in preparing these undernourished children for their age level in special schools under high pressure. In spite of the temporary success, it would have been more important to have spared these children intellectually and to have given them a chance to become their rightful age, especially through introducing the artistic element and limiting the intellectual teaching to a minimum. After a few years surely lasting results would have been obtained.

During my recent visit to many German Waldorf Schools and other educational institutions, the young people beyond puberty struck me as showing great intellectual achievement, but also as being high-strung and precocious. They did what was required of them, both physically and mentally, successfully and instantaneously. But in them was a flaming unrest, driving them to constant activity without the capacity for alternate repose.

Acute shocks, from war or other violence, result in a different picture studied best in curative institutions. I saw a six year old girl in a German institution who had been totally normal up to three years of age when she was buried for days under rubble. She had lost her speech, not yet regained it, and looked about her empty-eyed—a very backward child. In our own institutions we know less severe cases. The picture of severe shock is always one of a being pushed back from its individuality. Therapy consists in an endlessly loving guidance of this individuality towards a life which it can trust in again.

In lighter cases less severe regressions appear, but always the shock is an obstacle for mental development and the child sinks back into past phases like bedwetting, thumbsucking or reactions of fear.

Chronic influence of shock caused by parents' tensions and fears tends to work in the same direction, and is so well known that it has become the first thing to look for when dealing with regressive reactions in children.

Premature overburdening both in school and in life forms a picture like that caused by hunger, that is a premature flowering of mental capacity and at the same time a blocking of the emotional and will life. One can really say that our whole school system is more or less overburdened intellectually and consequently there is an accompanying emptiness of the feeling element, a diminishing of artistic, creative powers, an unrest of the will life which, left to itself, does not break through to any enthusiasm on a moral basis. This is really the central point in the struggle of the Rudolf Steiner Schools for a different education.

Since the war, thousands of parentless children still roam through Europe. Although those under twelve are practically all taken care of, there are still scores of children streaming in from the East Zone. In the Jugend Bunker at Hanover I spoke with a few little old men of nine in ragged clothes, pastmasters in the art of sleeping where it is forbidden and of finding food. They carried cardboard boxes containing their possessions. One unpacked his box at my request and proudly showed his only memory of a former life: a picture album of oldfashioned wedding pictures of parents and aunts. "That was my father," he said proudly shutting the album. Later I saw him search among the rubble . . . what for? Precocious, but what will he be like after thirty? Premature overburdening shows, like hunger, a psychopathic tendency.

The environment of the developing child, apart from the direct effects of war violence, has been greatly changed during the last fifty years by *increasing mechanisation*. The reactions of a modern child playing in the streets must needs be different from what they used to be if the child is to reach adulthood. Sense impressions have multiplied a thousandfold. The pole of awakening consciousness has been strengthened. Dreamy feelings do not counterbalance it as they do not find room to unfold in the modern homes which have no twilight and no silence. Creative powers springing from the imagination are not exercised. Footstools which served as boats and trains have disappeared. The little metal toy cars which take their place are too perfect for the imagination to add anything to them.

Rudolf Steiner, as far back as 1919, pointed out that the task of a new education for the twentieth century should be to free the emotional life—which during the first period of childhood, from birth to the seventh year, is still strongly fettered to organic desires such as hunger and thirst—to free the emotional desires from these organic ones and to connect them with thought pictures which, in turn, can enable the child to develop ideas after puberty. Fostered by warmth these ideas should be allowed to grow into ideals which will work back into the will as moral impulses.

The merely technical, merely intellectual manner of teaching leaves the dreamy emotional life cold, and this then turns backward and becomes bound increasingly to the physical desires and to those engendered by the senses. In this way our civilization undermines its own foundations.

The influence of mechanized, materialistic culture on our young people can make for psychopathic tendencies in a very special way. It creates the type of intelligent, a-moral human being who gratifies his desires. The general picture shifts increasingly towards the type which recognizes hard facts as the only reality and is bored by its factory-made amusements and radio.

It would be the task of great school teachers to direct the feelings of the child towards the contents of culture. This can only be done in a way to awaken real love if one starts with the young child and develops the life of feeling systematically by introducing the artistic element not as a subject in itself but as a leaven throughout the entire curriculum. In this respect the Waldorf Schools have a considerable headstart.

Translated by Marie H. Reif

THE NATURE OF A CHILD'S SOUL

The Temperaments And How To Treat Them

BY CAROLINE VON HEYDEBRAND, TRANSLATION BY DAPHNE HARWOOD

(Continued from Volume 11, Number 4)

The Melancholic Child

It is Gwendolen's eighth birthday and her mother has invited her playmates to tea. But Gwendolen is not to be found. She has hidden herself away under the long cloth of the living-room table—and there she remains. She doesn't want to hear of playmates. When she is drawn out from her hiding place under the table she flees into a corner, weeps softly to herself and then stares with a troubled face but longing eyes at the other children's games. When at last she can persuade herself to join in, she is blissfully happy, looking at all the children in turn with brilliant eyes which beseech sympathy; and she is terribly distressed when they have to go. One little girl in particular she kisses tenderly, calling her, inwardly her 'friend'; later on, when alone she adorns this little girl in her fancy with the loveliest qualities, especially those which she herself lacks.

Gwendolen is fond of getting into dark, shut-in places to brood by herself; she is to be found under the sofa, between the cupboard and the door, or even in the cupboard. She is fond of climbing up into the attic and crouching in a corner on one of the roof beams there. In the garden she hides in the bushes or under the dark drooping branches of fir trees. She also loves to climb trees and sit quite still on a branch where the foliage is thickest and none will discover her. She is no coward although she dreads people. There is something adventurous about her undertakings, they spring from a rich, but rather singular imagination. She thinks a great deal. And she herself plays a great part in her thoughts. Sometimes she is a princess, sometimes a poor deserted orphan, sometimes a hero, sometimes a persecuted innocent. She applies any story that is told her to herself, and cannot hear the story of Cinderella without transposing herself to such an extent into Cinderella's situation—or rather transposing Cinderella's situation to such an extent into her own—that she believes she has herself had the same experiences. She is often quite incomprehensible to grown-up people because she is playing some part they would never dream of; she never sees herself as the simple little girl she really is. Her large eyes which readily become moist or brilliant, gaze now gloomily, now with uncanny cheerfulness for no apparent cause; she alone knows the cause. The thin straight hair which shades her high white forehead is transformed in her fancy into flowing golden locks, and at such times she will hold up her little head, which usually droops, and keep her little back, generally bent, upright and proud. Unfortunately this does not last long.

In herself, when she is not playing a part, she is a rather sad, unharmonious little girl (grown-up people call her moody), as if she did not be-

long to the reality of this world. She is sensitive, and her *amour-propre* is tender and easily wounded. She always feels self-conscious in the presence of other people, immediately loses her ease, and then, as she instinctively adopts some pose, is privately ashamed of herself for doing so. For her age she is far too conscious, and she often behaves like a little adult. She puts searching questions: Why cannot one see God? What will happen when the world comes to an end? How long is eternity? and so forth. She is unperturbed by the death of a relative and fails to understand the sorrow of adults: "He is in Heaven, therefore one ought rather to rejoice." She is very pious but with a certain quaint nuance, almost medieval. Although very anxious to get and to keep what belongs to her—not however with noisy clamour—she is quite capable of giving away her apple or her sweets from a kind of childlike asceticism especially if she is ashamed and repenting of some naughtiness. At such times she may give away her dearest treasures, only afterwards to lament them by herself long and bitterly.

She is much preoccupied with her 'sins'—thus she magnifies her childish naughtinesses. She confides to one adored aunt that she would gladly die: "For now I am still little and have not incurred many sins; I might still go to Heaven; but later I shall have many sins to my account and shall not be able to go to Heaven." She is excessively openhearted when she loves somebody—but otherwise 'as close as an oyster,' so her mother says, sighing; for she has not won her child's confidence, and no power on earth could constrain Gwendolen to open her heart to her. This is how it appears on the surface. But once—when she was younger—she beheld her mother fast asleep and instantly imagined that she was dead, and she herself was terrified to death and never forgot this frightful moment; a moment which revealed her true relationship to her mother. But neither does she forget that her mother once struck her. She felt deeply the injustice of this chastisement for she had not done what her mother accused her of doing. But what she felt still more deeply was the corporal punishment; she felt her honour wounded like a medieval Spaniard. It was years before she could get over the feeling of shame.

She never forgets home-thrusts and her fancy magnifies and accentuates an injury until it becomes unendurable and weighs the little girl down with a burden greater than she can bear. She is capable of behaving like the Russian boy who wrote a list of all the injuries he considered himself to have received, and hid it away for a long time, so that one day he might cancel them all at once in an agony of love and repentance.

One thing quite out of keeping with her precocious nature makes her a target for constant nagging and reproof—namely, that at eight years old she still sucks her thumb, gnaws her wispy hair and her finger nails, chews shirt studs and bites pencils and pens. She can be found hunched up under the sofa, thumb in mouth, as if she wanted to shut herself off from the surrounding world. Her games often end in this way. For choice she plays by herself with great concentration. She is a most touching mother to her dolls. But as if overwhelmed and soon exhausted by the volume of her, largely abstract, imaginings, she seeks refreshment in the manner described. Her greatest joy is to crouch on the carpet, if possible hidden among the folds of a curtain, sucking a sweet, or letting her little musical box play while she reads stories and moral tales. She loves long sad stories and scorns merry tales and jokes. This however is only on the surface, for actually no one is so glad to laugh as she,

and she is thankful to anyone whose jokes and fun can make her laugh. She experiences free untrammelled laughter as a kind of release, and this she is well aware of although she is so young:—her power of observation in what concerns herself is almost uncanny. But she sharply repudiates any obvious effort made to cheer her up. One can only please her by outwitting her. Fundamentally she is not sorry to be sad.

* * *

Bodily Basis of the Melancholic Temperament

Gwendolen's appetite is not large as a rule: she is dainty. She loves sweets and sweet foods, and she is an inveterate nibbler, to her own mortification. Her plausible efforts to give up this 'sin' have hitherto been in vain. Her most explicit dislike is of meat which retains its animal form: hares, chickens, fish, etc. She cannot be prevailed upon to touch a morsel of it. But where the origin of the meat is unrecognizable she will often eat it with relish. (Quite without sentimentality—one should avoid serving up animals in their original form to children. It is better to give them their meat cut up. Even for less susceptible children it is not nice to see their friends served up at table, and children are the friends of animals and love them.) Gwendolen, too, loves animals, and crouching in her rabbits' hutch she confides to them all the troubles of her overladen heart, misunderstood by the grown-up people.

Gwendolen suffers from chronic constipation. Fortunately she is fond of fruit, when it is ripe and sweet. In spite of her slenderness and her little angular white face, one feels her body is too heavy and is a burden to her. She drags her feet and walks with a stoop, hanging her head, and has constantly to be told: "Can't you lift your feet and hold yourself upright?" She is easily tired and suffers from headaches. It is true her vivid imagination often helps her to overcome bodily weakness when she exerts it. But actually the will to overcome is weak, though she would not admit this to herself. The earth's gravity seems to pull her down, her eyes seek the earth when she is out walking and she seldom raises her glance.

She falls asleep late because her penchant for imagining and making up stories in bed is very strong. In the morning she is very tired, scarcely to be induced to get up, and she remains fretful, moody and peevish for a long time. She dreads cold water and loves warmth above all. When she is ill—she is given to indigestion—she suffers a lot; but once convalescent she is delighted to be ill, and prolongs the state as much as possible, happy to be nursed and spoiled and getting the utmost enjoyment from the attention and kindness which grown-up people bestow on a sick child. Her eyes are not very strong, she has a tendency to shortsightedness, and since she reads immoderately both in bed and in bad light, in the dusk, it will soon be necessary for her to have glasses. Her sense of hearing is well developed and she is distinctly musical. She plays the piano and the violin and sings with pleasure. But she tends in singing to 'yowl,' to use her unkind brother's word for her yearning sentimental scoops. Both in soul and in body she is a delicate child and requires much care and loving understanding.

Treatment of the Melancholic Child

Sympathetic care and loving comprehension is as necessary to the melancholic child as its daily bread. But this must not be too conspicuously given.

For the melancholic child is a little egoist and loves to feel himself the centre of attention. Nevertheless he should always feel a sufficiency of warmth lest he harden himself in cramping repressions. He needs a person to whom he can open his heart, and he is not hard to satisfy in this matter. A few friendly understanding words will win his heart and confidence: especially if there is added to it some gentle friendly chaff at his peculiarities and difficulties which can make him smile at them himself.

The melancholic child demands much food for his spirit and for his soul. Whoever tells him stories or teaches him should choose a great many fairy tales, stories and biographies which stimulate him to forget his own depression by participating in the sad fates of other men. He will find the child exceedingly ready to do this. Moreover the adults with whom he lives should not shrink from letting him participate in their own sorrows and sufferings, past and present. That is, in so far as these are within his childish grasp and do not overburden and oppress him. To tell the child what you have had to endure yourself and what other people whom you know have had to endure, will have an immediately healing effect and will lessen and harmonise his melancholy. This will work in a far more salutary way than if you try to cheer him up and pluck him forcibly out of his low spirits.

The melancholic child will gladly perform little services if he feels that they will help to soothe pain. He will not make at all a bad nurse and he should be encouraged in such tasks—of course within the limits of his childish capacities. And this notwithstanding that he will probably be clumsy and perplexed at first owing to his constraint and because he always watches himself doing things and feels watched by others. But when he has overcome this he will nurse his sick mother or sister with deep inward joy and tenderness.

The melancholic child should be kept warm (naturally not to an exaggerated degree) and should never be washed or doused with completely cold water. He should go to bed at night with friendly, harmonious, thoughts and feelings, and should be awakened in the morning with great friendliness. Heavy food for him should be avoided, as it should for all children. Sun-ripened, sweet fruit, salads and fresh light vegetables are good for him. But also some red meat in addition will not hurt, and will generally be accepted readily. He needs mixed fare and stimulating food. Though he is very fond of sweet things and needs well-sweetened food, he will also like salty cheese straws and sour cucumber or salad. One will have to strive continually and tactfully to make his digestion good and to help him to move in a healthy way. This latter however should be sought rather in eurhythmy and musical exercises than in sport. Eurhythmy, which can help the melancholic child to combine his movements with the life of his soul, will bring a marvelous relief and healing to him once he has overcome the resistance he feels to revealing his nature to other people.

(To be continued in the next issue of the Bulletin.)

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