

RELIGION NOT A TRUE SUBLIMATION.

BY THEODORE SCHROEDER.

IN a recent article on: "The Theory of Recapitulation and the Religious and Moral Discipline of Children,"¹ Prof. Raymond Wells, of Washington University, defends the ancient valuations of religious education, with a near-minimum of the modifying influence of modern science. I wish to bring out the contrast between his view and my own view. The latter will perhaps exhibit the extreme consequences of the modifying influence of the psychoanalytic approach. By the "extreme consequence" I mean to indicate that I conceive myself to go farther than some psychoanalysts in the acceptance of a complete psychic determinism, and in the application of a larger concept of psychic evolution. I have not yet fully formulated these views of mine, but in a fragmentary way I have suggested something of my meaning in my efforts to introduce the psycho-genetic approach into the study and discussions of philosophy,² law,³ sociology,⁴ criminology,⁵ and religion.⁶

¹ *American Journal of Psychology*, 29: 371-382; Oct. 1918.

² "Intellectual Evolution and Pragmatism." *The Monist*, 26 (No. 1): 86-112; Jan. 1916.

"Psychologic View of the Pragmatic Issue." *The Monist*, 28 (No. 2): 273-281; Apr. 1918.

³ "Psychologic Study of Judicial Opinion." *Calif. Law Review*, 6 (No. 2): 89-111; Jan. 1918.

"Psychology, Democracy and Free Speech," *Medico-Legal Journal*, 34 (No. 4): 1-6; July 1917.

⁴ "Psycho-genetics of Androcratic Evolution." *Psychoanalytic Review*, 2 (No. 3): 277-285; July 1915.

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"Anarchism and 'The Lord's Farm'." *Open Court*, 33 (No. 10): 589-607; Oct. 1919.

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When persons of considerable scientific education are impelled to accept or defend religion, they seem to me to be out of tune with the stage of development to which religion (in the sense of the supernatural and superhuman) belongs. Therefore, I always suspect that attitude of theirs to be the product of an emotional conflict. In hystericals we find quite uniformly, that their emotional valuation of the superhuman, or of other mystical relationships, is compensatory for some feeling of inferiority. For them religion serves as the neutralizer of some fear or shame, with usually an erotic involvement.

THE EMOTIONAL CONFLICT.

Prof. Wells clearly exhibits an emotional conflict at work within himself, when he says: "Against such a view [as not teaching religion for reasons of its falsity] I would urge the teaching of religion for reasons of its value, regardless of its truth." From my viewpoint this looks much like a modern educator's resurrection and camouflage of the old and often discredited doctrine that "the elect" are justified in "lying for THE truth's sake". THE truth may be a different one than formerly, but the principle of conduct in relation thereto appears to be the same. Doubtless, Prof. Wells, better than I, can sympathize with St. Paul when he said: "If the truth of God hath more abounded by my lie unto His glory why yet am I adjudged a sinner?"⁷ Within a limited scope it is the old doctrine that: the end justified the means.

On the one hand Prof. Wells esteems his intellectual attainments too high to permit him to defend the value and the teachings

⁵ "Determinism, Conduct and Fear Psychology," *Psychoanalytic Review*, (No. 4) : 379-390; Oct. 1919.

"Criminology and Social Psychology," *Médico-Legal Journal*, 34 (No. 1) : 1-8; Apr. 1917.

"Political Crimes Defined," *Michigan Law Review*, 18 (No. 3) : 30-44; 1919.

"Theodore Schroeder in Defense of a Chinese," 11 (No. 8) ; 8-13; June 1916.

Everyman Magazine, (a plea for a pardon).

⁶ "Authorship of the Book of Mormon." "Psychologic Tests of W. F. Prince. Critically Reviewed." To which is now added a bibliography of Schroeder on Mormonism. Repr. *Amer. Jour. of Psychology*, 30 (No. 1) : 66-72; Jan. 1919.

See my essays too numerous to list, on the "Erotogenetic Interpretation of Religion." Some of the reprints of these have bibliographies attached.

⁷ Roman iii. 7. For more of this see: J. E. Remberg's *Bible Morals, Twenty Crimes and Vices Sanctioned by Scripture*. Pages 3-8, for justified lying.

of religion on the ground of its truth. Yet something will not allow him to throw religion overboard for its falsities. The conflict is obvious. His argument will be later seen to be merely a justification for this latter compulsion. He *feels* that religion has great value, because he has a great need for it, to neutralize some other feeling. Perhaps his religiosity is required to overcome fear, or shame; or to compensate for some great feeling of inferiority engendered some time in the past. Some other persons have no need to hold or to exhibit Prof. Wells' high appreciation of the moralities, especially as to sex. Why? Perhaps it is because some outgrow the embarrassing "moral" conflicts of the period of adolescence, while others carry those emotional disturbances and their attendant immature and conflicting emotional valuations all through life. When our adolescent embarrassments need a mask, we may then be impelled to intellectualize and rationalize that compulsion by such a theory as that of Prof. Wells', above quoted. If we are but defending a compulsion of our emotional conflict we will usually be induced to make use of a special plea, which ignores factors of the problem, quite obvious to others not similarly compelled. When the need for "moral" support is great or increasing, just to that same degree will the sustaining moral theories acquire a certitude and a value, approaching to the absolute.

As I read the above quotation from Prof. Wells, I received the impression that when writing it he acted (perhaps almost unconsciously) as if "truths", especially "moral truths" must be either black or white. For him there seem to be no grays or browns. "Moral" ideas evidently appear to him as being either false or true, as measured by some existant absolute standard. There is nothing in his article to suggest the fact that all our concepts are only relative approaches to being accurate transcripts of the realities. But beyond this act of manifesting his subconscious compulsion toward seeing only absolutes of truth and of falsity, he appears to embody within himself a subconsciously conditioned personal absoluteness, more important than any "truth" about objectives. When confronted with these overwhelming subjective valuations of his religion and of his religious morality, all questions of relative truths are submergences. If Prof. Wells did not subconsciously consider his feeling-value of religious morals as approximately absolute, he could not have ignored the problem of relative "truth" as applied to his personal estimate of "value". This choice of Prof. Wells, which is obviously subjectively determined, exhibits the usual

mental mechanisms involved, in every effort of hystericals to intellectualize an agreeable aspect of their emotional disturbance. The resultant rationalization is always a special plea. A feeling of inferiority subconsciously determines the intellectual methods for achieving compensation, by acts that seem to imply some subconscious partnership with or nearness to omniscience. Hence the tendencies to assume absolutes.

The situation looks different if persons are freed from emotional disturbance concerning religion, for then they no longer feel, act or write as if they gave a paramount "value" to any popular error. When persons think in terms of relative approaches to truth the tendency is to attach the greater values only to the maturer mental processes and the relative fulness of the data, by the co-ordination of which we may move a little farther away from absolute ignorance. The aim of education then becomes, in part, a matter of minimizing the relative influence of the emotional contribution to our sense of values. Now our educator's task is to manifest a greater and maturer devotion to the enlargement of human understanding as to the relations and behaviour among things, including the human animal, and of encouraging the desire to use that understanding as a *check* upon our primitive impulses, and upon the emotional valuations of immaturity. We may frankly confess our inability to "put over" on a child the last achievement of our own maturing. But, having become conscious of the trickery of their emotional conflicts, such persons will seldom camouflage their own ignorance, impatience or emotionalism behind theories of serving the child by falsehoods or moral sentimentalisms.

DOCTRINE OF RECAPITULATION.

Next, Prof. Wells quotes Haeckel's doctrine, that biologically the individual life is a condensed recapitulation of the racial life. Then he transfers that doctrine of recapitulation over to psychic evolution, in order to use it for the purpose of justifying the proposition already quoted. He adds: "The recapitulation does not occur after the beginning of adolescence." Evidently this limitation on the doctrine of recapitulation is only the creation of Prof. Wells' necessities. It obviously means that, at the time of writing, Prof. Wells was not conscious of any evolution of human desires or of mental processes beyond that which is habitual at the beginning of adolescence. For the time he excluded from consciousness the fact

that he himself has achieved such adolescent and post-adolescent development. Combining these inferences, I conclude that Prof. Wells' emotional conflict and fixation of interest came into being during the "moral" turmoil of early adolescence, and that his subsequent intellectual progress must thereby have been largely restricted to the making of more sophisticated and more erudite explanations and justifications for some aspects or compulsions of his adolescent conflict. The essay now under discussion exhibits that process. A different education, or psychic development might have brought about a reunification of his personality above the evolutionary level of the adolescent conflict. Had the growth of his own desires and mental processes evolved to a condition consciously beyond the adolescent stage, he could not have arbitrarily excepted the adolescent and post-adolescent growth from the general evolutionary recapitulation. Neither is it probable that then he could have justified the filling of the child's mind with enshrined "moralities" regardless of their falsehood or the falsehood of the sustaining theory of their superhuman origin.

This same lack of the larger evolutionary grasp is also evident in the following paragraph. "The plan of education on a recapitulatory basis is to furnish to the developing individual, as far as this is possible, the appropriate environment for his stage of development. In religious education this means *encouraging* the natural succession of religious beliefs, just as they have occurred in the history of the race." (p. 374, Italics are mine.)

If we co-ordinate this last quotation with the first statement above quoted, we can be quite logically led to conclude that Prof. Wells means that because it is useful the child is to be "*encouraged*" to believe as true *all* the succession of religious follies ever entertained during the childhood of the race. Nothing is to be done as a matter of education to show that we have profited by racial follies. Had Prof. Wells possessed a different concept of the recapitulation theory, he would have given more attention to the fact that this recapitulation is not known to be, nor generally believed by biologists to mean, an exact, detailed and perfectly complete reproduction. There are displacements, compressions, omissions, shortcuts. Surely on the side of the physical development Prof. Wells would not insist that his child needs to recapitulate *all* of savage life. One not inhibited therefrom, might be tempted to use also the racial experience in the matter of the religious development, to accelerate and improve the process of education by perfecting our

concept of psychic evolution and of sublimation, and by consciously encouraged omissions.

ACCELERATING RECAPITULATION.

When we seek consciously to accelerate the natural processes of evolution and use a fairly well developed intelligence to that end, we seek to shorten or eliminate those stages of evolution which have least permanent value. Even from the more orthodox point of view this might mean to hurry the child past some aspects of primitive religiosity. I wonder if even Prof. Wells would have his child "encouraged" to believe in all the phallic religions, demonology, witchcraft, religious sadisms, snake worship and scatologic rites⁸ as being both valuable and true because they were inevitable during racial development. I think I may assume that he would not. If he seemed to imply the contrary it was only because his emotional conflict, and the subconscious defensive needs of his autonomic system, compelled him to exclude these factors of religion from consciousness, so they would not discredit the seeming efficiency of his special plea, as a neutralizer of his suppressed adolescent fears.

It seems to me that, a greater freedom from emotional disturbance and a more mature view of the theory of recapitulation, as well as of the evolution of desires and of mental processes, would have led Prof. Wells into a different train of thought. Then he might have said that at each stage of development a child should *not* be environed by conditions suitable to that stage; but rather that the environment should be so unsuitable as to create dissatisfaction and a resultant desire to be guided to a higher stage of development. In religious education this does not mean the *encouragement* of a succession of religious beliefs such as have infested the childhood of the race. On the contrary, it would mean to encourage a distrust and disbelief of them. These matters, erroneously deemed valuable according to the emotional standards of primitive ignorance, are now to be rapidly outgrown, or skipped if possible. To give historical information and to *encourage disbelief* concerning primitive religions or all religion, I might deem of some value. This value would be proportionate to the amount of enlightenment which went with it, concerning the mental and emotional mechanisms involved in the formations of primitive religious beliefs and in their present rejection. A child thus educated in all likelihood would

⁸ For bibliography of these see my: "Erotogenesis of Religion." A bibliography. Bruno Chap Books, 3 (No. 2): Feb. 1916; 59 p.

find it impossible in maturity of years, to write such a special plea as Prof. Wells has written, probably in unconscious explanation or defense of his unsolved adolescent emotional problems.

TABOO AND DIVINE MORALITY.

After a very brief descriptive classification of the religions of primitive humans, Prof. Wells continues his argument thus: "The early belief in taboo and growing out of this the belief in God-given codes of law, are instrumental to the maintenance of desirable forms of conduct during early life, and to the formation of good habits that will persist after the disciplinary beliefs that once supported them have disappeared. As it was with the race, so it should be with the individual. Moral education should begin with taboo and belief in a God of external authority as the strongest support of morality at the dawn of adolescence. * * * Children must have a sense of God as giver of laws whose demand is right because he wills it, and certainly at adolescence there must be religion to guide the moral life if at no other time."

I believe that such a statement could only come from one afflicted with a greater repression which required neutralization by becoming, toward the child a mouthpiece of God. Such a statement could only come from one who enjoys the influence which comes from being the assumed spokesman of a God of external authority. In the other aspect of the personal conflict such a person would doubtless loath that much of megalomania.

To instil in a child a religious (i. e. emotional) valuation of taboo is to plant the seeds of a sanctified ignorance, the source of all intolerance, and inquisitions. To give to childhood beliefs an avoidable emotional value, or to ascribe to them a superhuman sanction, is to increase the difficulty in outgrowing childhood's errors. It is just this enshrined ignorance, grown intolerant under the supposed authority of omniscience, which has most retarded the evolution of the race. By the same process it will also retard the evolution of the individual. The development of such primitive emotional fixations in the present generation is an injurious inhibition against further intellectual development. Nothing can be more stultifying to a self-reliant and harmonious adjustment to evolutionary social processes, than a "belief in a God of external authority" unless it is a belief in a God of internal authority. Both beliefs are usually grounded in emotionalism and this tends to close the door of our understanding for natural law in social relations,

and tends to inhibit a cheerful adjustment thereto. Thus do our primitive "morals" and our social institutions achieve a relatively static position instead of a consciously accelerated growth toward a more intelligent mode of behaviour.

It is just during the stormy period of adolescence that we least need the support of the morality of authority, unless those who guide our development are incompetent to give us anything more illuminating. During adolescence we are most in need of real enlightenment especially about the behaviour of sex-emotions. If, however, we are so ignorant of the emotional disturbances which find their roots in unenlightened efforts to adjust to an ignorant moral authority, and this morality is enforced with consciousness of its falsity, then we may see no way out except through a more desperate adherence to our "inspired" and absolute moral authority and its primitive moral creeds. The same inadequate understanding of conflicting emotions, which imposes such a necessity even upon some college professors, also compels them to assert with "many critics" that Freud probably over-estimates the role of sex-instinct in the economy of life." If these persons had a better psychogenetic view of themselves, a different estimate might come into being. Until they achieve the courage to submit themselves to thorough personal psychoanalysis they are not very competent critics of Freudian theories.⁹

SOME FREUDIANS AND SUBLIMATION.

There are some Freudians who have not adequately cleared up their own emotional disturbances, and others are so exclusively engrossed with studies of the pathologic states, that they have also failed to discover much psychic evolution beyond adolescence. These Freudians give color to Prof. Wells' next error which is: "On Freudian principles religion is a valuable form of sublimation, especially at the beginning of adolescence as well as earlier". From another viewpoint it is only a false sublimation. It consists only of the use of infantile mental processes, to supply a new self-explanation, which seems socially helpful chiefly because more in harmony with the demands of a relatively undeveloped society. We forget that acts may become socially more comfortable or even relatively useful without implying any true psychologic sublimation in the actor. Instead of getting out of trouble by the method of

⁹ For elaboration see my: "Psychologic Aspect of Free Association," *Am. Jour. of Psychology*, 30: 260-273; July 1919.

dealing more efficiently with the objective realities, the religionist finds compensations in a world of phantasy and an emotional identification with something supposed to be super-human and super-physical. Psychoanalysts with considerable of unsolved emotional problems may easily deceive themselves in believing that they have cured a case of pathologic dishonesty when, with the aid of religious intellectualizations they induce the patient to act on the other aspect of the conflicting impulses. Hypnotic suggestion, New Thought and Christian Science, have been making similar "cures". Pathologically "honest" persons may be more comfortable to live with because we can always and easily exploit them, but they are not cured. We need to bear in mind the difference between a "social recovery" and a psychologic recovery. The same comment applies to cases of other pathologic anti-social behaviour which may change to a pathologic devotion to law and order, or to a morbid attachment to social conventions and morality, or to philanthropy. As Freud conceived this problem, our maturer desire will be to outgrow the necessity for authoritative morals and to substitute therefore, an enlarged understanding of the relations and behaviour among humans. Prof. Wells' "moral" necessities probably kept him from searching where he would have found Freud's views as expressed in: "Modern Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness".¹⁰ To outgrow moral conflicts I conceive to be one of the objects of future education, on the part of those whose psychologic understanding and the necessities of whose autonomic system will permit it.¹¹ Then we will only have evolutionary classifications of the psyche.

Apparently Prof. Wells has many repressions of his own. In consequence of these the conventional moralities are very, very dear and very necessary to him, as a neutralizer of some fear, possibly based upon some persistent adolescent moral self-reproach, still working below the surface of consciousness. In consequence of this necessity, he quite misinterprets Freudian psychology. Of course, there are some avowed Freudians who also find themselves intellectually and emotionally unable to follow the deterministic psychology of their master to its logical conclusion.

¹⁰ *Amer. Jour. of Urology and Sexology*, 11: 291-305; Oct. 1915.

¹¹ I hope soon to elaborate this psychic evolution, under the title: *Before and after Morality*. Now see my: "Determinism Conduct and Fear Psychology," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 6 (No. 4): Oct. 1919. Also see for this general viewpoint, Kempf's: *The Autonomic System and the Personality*.

RELIGION IS FALSE SUBLIMATION.

Whatever may be the cause of Prof. Wells' extravagant appraisal of his moralities, I cannot agree with him when he further says: "Much of the early sublimations in later childhood would, in an ideal scheme of things, take place under the influence of religion of the legalistic sort." I would esteem this a very great and evil hinderance to a true sublimation. By "true sublimation" I especially mean a sublimation in the sense of an evolution in the psychologic aspect of desire and of mental processes, as that concept of psychic evolution is being developed by psychoanalysts. To this, of course, must come mainly by a growth in the multiplicity, complexity and diversity of objectives, relatively understood and consciously co-ordinated in each present judgment, and a corresponding lessening of the influence of the emotions. It is just the course recommended by Prof. Wells, which so often produces emotional and intellectual fixations at low evolutionary levels, and thereby creates hysterias, all forms of anti-social behaviour and some insanities. It is because of this that the emotional valuations of religious morals and their absolutism are esteemed a hinderance to true sublimation. It is upon this ground that Freud and some of the psychoanalysts discredit the moralities. Religious instruction, in so far as it is distinctively religious and religiously efficient, diverts the interest from, and so far discredits and necessarily tends to inhibit the greater interest in understanding the relations and behaviour among objectives, including the humans and their sex emotions. And it is a psychic development based largely upon a co-ordination of such understanding that I conceive to be the more intelligent object of education, and an essential factor of all true sublimation.

TRUE SUBLIMATION.

All education (true sublimation) is relative, and these relativities extend in many directions. There are relative degrees of development in different persons upon different subjects, according to different standards each measuring different aspects of the human relationship to nature in general and the human environment in particular. In evolutionary psychology the effort is to furnish criteria for determining relative degrees of maturing, away from the infantile status of desires, of mental processes, and of the relative understanding of a relative multiplicity, diversity and com-

plexity of objectives, and of the use which is made of such understanding.

From this viewpoint I think of education as a growth in which the intellect is instructed in the relations and behaviour among things, and is helped to make ready and joyous use of that understanding to check and guide the more primitive impulses of man, as these express themselves through and by the more or less unconscious automatisms of the autonomic systems, to the achievement of progressively more complete self-expression, ever more and more in harmony with natural law; that is, growth in the more efficient achievement of ever more mature personal ends, by the more perfect adjustment of the human physical constitution and the temperament to the requirements of the environment, which adjustments thus tend to unify the personal ends with social ends and with all natural processes.

The relations and behaviour among things which are to be understood, must therefore, include an understanding of the behaviour of the human passions and desires, and the mental and emotional mechanisms by which these are sought to be realized and justified, masked and evaded, as well as the mental processes and data by which they may be checked and developed. This understanding is not very adequate unless it includes an evolutionary concept of desire and of mental processes, and a relatively large understanding of the relations and behaviour among things, all properly integrated with the effective life, so as to compel the autonomic system to function according to highly evolved and ever-maturing methods for the accomplishment of aims which also grow ever more mature and more inclusive in the sense of social character-developing.

This education consists in the ever more efficient use of an ever larger understanding, for refashioning the will to a more harmonious and more conscious submission of the personality to the arbitrament of its inevitable determinants, both within and without the human animal. This involves some deliberate elimination of conflicting emotional compulsions, as by Freudian methods, the otherwise inevitable determinants. Individuals are truly educated (in the sense of having evolved to relatively mature character status) just to the extent that they are free from emotional conflicts and possess the consequent relative freedom from blinding feeling-compulsions, which tend to inhibit the use of cold logic processes such as might be otherwise applied to the products of

dispassionate observation, covering a growing multiplicity, complexity and diversity of natural objects in process of behaving; differing degrees of success being again measured by the relative achievement in co-ordinating the relative multiplicity, variety and complexity of such knowledge thus acquired, into one synthesis for immediate automatic application, not so much to the justification as to the checking and modification of the more primitive impulses and to the correction of the instinctive subconscious valuations and judgments and of its automatic reactions.

Thus we may measure relative degrees of education or efficient sublimation: (1) By the relative multiplicity, diversity and complexity, of objective and subjective data, concerning the relations and behaviour of nature's forces and things including humans; (2) The relative scope in point of time and space which is covered and included in the understanding of this data; (3) The number and variety of aspects of conditioning circumstances under which that behaviour is understood; (4) The relative degrees to which our concepts approach to being perfect transcripts of the reality conceived; and (5) The relative degrees of efficiency evinced in using the aforescribed intelligence as a check and corrective (instead of a rationalization and justification) of our primitive impulses. This then constitutes true sublimation as I conceive it, and it is scarcely on speaking terms with anything which I or Prof. Wells would consider religious education.