

Appendix Two

The Secular Mystics

Having looked at the foundational premises that constitute a biblical approach to parenting, we now turn our attention to what biblical parenting is not. For nearly 200 years, American parents were content with the status quo of the Judeo/Christian influence. There were no compelling reasons to look elsewhere for direction. American parents not only maintained social cohesiveness within the traditional family but also passed it on successfully from generation to generation. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s did things begin to change.

During that turbulent era, social contentment quickly turned to social resentment. In a five year span, we witnessed the Watergate scandal, riots in our cities, violent demonstrations, assassinations of political figures, the dishonoring of the presidency, and the unpopularity of the war in Vietnam. The turmoil of that era served as the birth pains of a new society.

Emerging from the cocoon of social change was a new parenting generation. Post-war baby boomers were just starting their families. Tired of war, political corruption, the abuse of power, and their own failed identity, that generation worked hard to remove itself from any association with past parenting practices. They decided to do things differently with their children, and so they did.

Baby boomers have always been an impatient group, and their collective generational impatience incited them to immediate change. As a result of leaping before looking, they became captive to secular mystics, philosophers, and scientists who call all men to the religion of human reason.

In order to facilitate the promised idealism of the scientific community, the American parent had to leave the Judeo/Christian beliefs and practices of our forefathers and embrace a new scientism.³⁰ Brewing in university test tubes for more than a hundred years were the collective thoughts of old and new thinkers.

30. In times past, biblical theology was considered the queen of the sciences with Christian philosophy as its handmaiden. But with the rise of the natural sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there developed a *scientism* that became unaccountable to biblical revelation and which is now totally secular and autonomous. Scientism was the messiah of the baby-boom generation.

Men such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, Arnold Gesell, B. F. Skinner, Rudolf Dreikurs, and many others pushed hard to revolutionize parenting beliefs from the traditional values of the past to a new, scientific dogmatism. It was from their collective work that our present day affair with democratic parenting became active.

What is democratic parenting? It is a hybrid philosophy that blends assumptions about the goodness of human nature with the political theory of absolute social equality. At the core of these assumptions is the belief that children are born naturally good and virtuous, not capable of or responsible for doing wrong. That new way of looking at children created new ground rules for the training of infants, toddlers, and youth. A willing generation of baby-boom parents quickly adopted these ground rules. They wanted to do things differently.

THE FATHERS OF HUMANISTIC PARENTING

The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau sowed the seeds of democratic parenting in the eighteenth century. Rousseau is credited with the first serious attack in modern history on the biblical view of a child's sinful nature.

What kind of man was Rousseau? Rousseau was gifted in words but not in virtue, and he certainly had no love for children. All 5 babies born to his mistress were taken at birth and disposed of at the *Hospital des Enfants-trouvés*, a death mill that received 3,000 abandoned infants per year. Two out of every 3 would die within their first year, and only 14 of the 3,000 would make it to maturity. Rousseau did not name any of his children or record their dates of birth. He did not even take the time to see what sex they were.³¹ He simply left them to their fate, knowing the probable outcome.

Years later, the deist Voltaire publicly condemned Rousseau for his acts of infanticide. In a defensive response, Rousseau put forth the view that, instead of being evil by nature, man is born originally good, not naturally capable of evil thoughts or acts. Children, he said, remain righteous and innocent until contaminated by traditions and beliefs of adults. Parents and teachers, not nature, direct the child toward evil tendencies.³² Since parents and teachers are the corrupting element, he argued, children would be better off raised by the State.

31. See Paul Johnson's, *The Intellectuals* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), pp. 21-22.

32. Louis Thorpe, *Child Psychology and Development* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1946), p. 12.

In developing that argument, Rousseau started with the state of nature. He postulated that since nature itself is good and pure, and since children are born out of nature, then they are also born good and pure. That is, there is something within a child that gives him a bias for virtue. He suggested that if a child is left to his natural way, unhindered by members of a corrupt society, his natural virtues would flourish. The duty of society, Rousseau argued, is to guide the child in that natural process. The institution that can best oversee that project is the State.

Rousseau's influence can be traced in a spiderweb fashion throughout the views of other philosophers and child-rearing activists. Many Americans are familiar with the name Henry David Thoreau, the nineteenth century philosopher and writer. Thoreau adopted Rousseau's views on the goodness of nature and the moral innocence of children. He believed that each child is born in nature and should be encouraged to continue to live a free and uncommitted life that is reflective of nature. According to Thoreau, the natural way is good and beneficial; parents who try to alter this natural way corrupt the child.

The collective thoughts of Rousseau and Thoreau highly influenced the founder of the Yale Clinic of Child Development, Arnold Gesell. This pre- and post-World War II figure believed that children are born in league with nature. That is, they are out of, part of, and one with the goodness of nature. As Gesell states it, "A purified and perfected end product of the immense, immemorial forces of biological evolution."³³

Why are there bad children? Gesell would echo the thinking of Rousseau and Thoreau and blame defective parenting. If a child is naughty, it is because a restrictive and undemocratic environment perverted his or her natural goodness.

In her critique of child guidance literature, author Diane Kessler writes, "Gesell assumes that if a child misbehaves, he does so either because the parent has failed to understand the child's needs in a particular developmental stage, or because such behavior is an unfortunate but normal part of his or her developmental level which he or she will grow out of. Any blame for a child's misbehavior is never focused on the child because of the tacit assumptions that bad actions are not really the child's fault or responsibility."³⁴

33. Arnold Gesell, *Studies in Child Development* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1948), p. 83.

34. Diane Kessler, *Parents and the Experts* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), p. 29.

According to Gesell, if parents will encourage a child's natural way and not tamper with it, his or her good nature will blossom. Dr. Gesell's hope for mankind rested on two fundamental beliefs—the natural goodness of children and the progression of science. Of the first, he writes, “The intrinsic charm of goodness of childhood still constitutes the best guarantee of the future perfectibility of mankind.”³⁵ Of the second, he states, “With science and yet more science, the race may hope to attain higher orders of morality and subjugate the lingering wickedness which a million years of evolution have not abolished.”³⁶ By carrying this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, one can easily understand why Gesell believed that punishment and restrictions are undemocratic as well as unnecessary.³⁷ The double wrapping that holds Gesell's child-rearing theories together is the blending of Rousseau's and Thoreau's views on the innate goodness of children and his own democratic ideals.

Gesell wrote during a time of American history when anti-Hitler sentiments were strong. He believed that structured authority in parenting was wrong, pointing to Nazi Germany as a warning and the logical conclusion of such a structure. Gesell believed that the German people surrendered themselves to one man because they had not been raised as social equals with their parents and teachers.³⁸ He further postulated that children raised in a democracy should be raised in democratic homes in which everyone is equal and each has a vote.

Giving a child unlimited freedom of expression, equality, and parental friendship were all part of Gesell's formula for a better world. His lofty ideals, research, and persuasive theories quickly found their way into the university classroom, where they began to shape the minds of those who would parent in the 1970s.

Two more twentieth-century men of influence who directly and indirectly aided democratic parenting were the famed behaviorist, B. F. Skinner, and the Viennese-born, American psychiatrist and educator, Rudolf Dreikurs. Skinner is best known for his strict environmental view of development. He viewed man's body as personless flesh and the environment as the catalyst of

35. *The Child from Five to Ten* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 453.

36. *Studies in Child Development*, p. 12.

37. *Parents and the Experts*, p. 30.

38. “Gesell's understanding of persons does not square with historical facts. The evil we see in history reflects evil tendencies in humanity on a collective as well as an individual scale. Although Gesell recognizes and fears the destructive capacity of a Nazi Germany, he fails to link this damning evidence to his own naive ideas about human nature.” *Ibid*, p. 74.

behavior.³⁹ To Skinner, all behavior is the reflection of one's environment, not of uncontrolled emotions or feelings. Behaviorists do not attempt to change behavior, but the environment that stimulates behavior. Kessler explains by this example: "when Susie hits Johnny because he has taken away her toy, she is responding with an act of anger, not an angry feeling. *Since there is no person inside the body*, there are no angry feelings, only actions displaying what we call anger. Behavior begets behavior in response, not feelings"⁴⁰ (emphasis added).

Skinner advocated the removal or manipulation of all boundaries to avoid conflict. A little boy spills his milk. Solution? Restructure the environment by simply moving the milk, thus avoiding the conflict.⁴¹

Conflict, Skinner believed, is negative, and parents should avoid it. Although Skinner placed a greater emphasis on environmental influences than on the presupposed good nature of children, his final conclusion was no different than the others. Children are born morally neutral and, if given unlimited freedom, will become socially acceptable.

Lesser known, but still influential, was Rudolf Dreikurs. Dreikurs influenced the educational elite, who in turn influenced the American teachers of the last half of this century.⁴² Following in the way of his predecessors, he furthered the notion of democratic parenting and added to its momentum by providing a structured program for the training of parents and teachers.⁴³

He encouraged us to have faith in human nature, though he believed man's nature to be morally neutral. As he related that view to children, he postulated that they are void of inherent corruption and, therefore, have no natural propen-

39. Skinner considered man to exist in a personless body. "The picture which emerges from a scientific analysis is not a body with a person inside, but a body which is a person in the sense that it displays a complete repertoire of behavior. Autonomous man is a device used to explain what we can not explain in any other way. He has been constructed from our ignorance, and as our understanding increases, the very stuff of which he is composed vanishes." *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 199-200.

40. *Parents and the Experts*, p. 57.

41. Training in self-discipline is not an isolated action. When mastered, the self-discipline it takes for a child not to spill the milk is the same self discipline that will help him later in life.

42. Rudolf Dreikurs was the founder of the Alfred Adler School of Psychology in Chicago. He actively served seven years as the vice president of the American Humanist Association, according to *Who Was Who in America* (Marquis Who's Who, Inc., 1973), p. 195. When asked of his religious affiliation, he maintained, "By birth I am a Jew, by choice a Humanist." Janet Turner and W.L. Pew, *The Courage to Be Imperfect* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1978), p. 341.

43. Active Parenting, a contemporary parenting program with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, is based on the humanistic theories of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs. Similar programs include P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness Training) and S.T.E.P. (Systematic Training in Effective Parenting).

sity toward wayward behavior.⁴⁴ A home life that fosters democratic ideals encourages goodness in children, resulting in feelings of equality. A restrictive environment encourages evil tendencies, resulting in feelings of inferiority.

Dreikurs's political theories—more particularly his convictions about democracy and his distaste for Nazi Germany—as well as his own relationship with his father, influenced the implementation of his parenting theories. Dreikurs's definition of democracy is not the same as we understand it to be in the United States, where authority and submission work within the confines of the democratic process.⁴⁵ Dreikurs completely rejected all authority and submission, stating such to be nothing more than a struggle between superior and inferior structures in human relationships.

Superiority and inferiority of family members was a major component in Dreikurs's thinking. For example, regarding rewards and punishment, he stated, "Rewarding children for good behavior is as detrimental to their outlook as a system of punishment."⁴⁶ Both punishment and rewards require another person to be superior. If a parent is superior, then there is no equality with the child. Dreikurs concluded that the absence of equality fosters innate feelings of inferiority within the child, resulting in his acting naughty in an attempt to become equal or superior. If you eliminate the source of conflict (parental authority), you eliminate naughty behavior.

Dreikurs also believed that, since children are equal in human value, neither parents nor teachers have the right to expect or force conformity. Carrying this view to its extreme, he believed each child has "the right to decide for oneself, to be self-determining, to refuse to submit to coercion and domination by others," such as parents and teachers.⁴⁷ Dreikurs was confusing the goal of parenting with the practice of parenting. That became a criticism even from his humanist colleagues. As hard as he tried to diffuse the weakness of his logic (equality for all family members, yet maintaining social order without the exercise of authority), he failed to do so.

44. Dreikurs believed strongly in the potential of human goodness and the progression of mankind. He said, "Those who have no faith in human nature and wish to subdue and to regiment it are opposed to progress and try to turn back the wheel of time." *Challenge of Marriage* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), p. 252.

45. See Rudolf Dreikurs, "Humanism—A Philosophy for Human Living," *Humanist*, No. 10, (1950): pp. 73-74.

46. *Children: The Challenge* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1964), pp. 72, 74.

47. *The Courage to Be Imperfect*, p. 312.

Dreikurs envisioned future families as small townships where each member of the community could come together with one vote to rule on family affairs. Thus the “town council” runs the family, not the parents. In fact, he redefined the term “parent” to mean equal but different. Mom and Dad are to be buddies, not authority figures. This view is majority rule taken to an extreme. With the voice of Rudolf Dreikurs, democratic parenting concepts continued to develop in university curriculums.

WORLD VIEW AND PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

Rousseau, Thoreau, Gesell, Skinner, and Dreikurs are not the only voices of democratic parenting, but they do form a convenient five-some of comparison. In examining the work of these men, we need to distinguish between their discoveries and the implications drawn from their discoveries.

They have all made contributions to our society either directly or indirectly. Skinner’s theories have been helpful in training severely mentally-handicapped individuals. Gesell has contributed to our understanding of childhood stages and school readiness. Thoreau reminded us of the sanctity of nature and the need to protect it.

But no one can interpret a discovery apart from his own personal world view. Although these men represent the best of human reason,⁴⁸ their lingering influence raises disturbing questions about human gullibility—indeed about the propensity of parents to accept anything that ties man’s nature and behavior exclusively to natural phenomena at the expense of biblical revelation. And, like most extreme doctrines, their views on human nature rest upon unverified assumptions. No one has ever demonstrated the innate goodness or neutrality of man’s being. When one removes God from his thinking, the most obvious explanations for life are no longer an option.

What is the legacy of the secular mystics? They developed destructive heresies on the nature of man and the nurturing of children, as seen in the following comparisons between democratic and biblical parenting.

Democratic Model	Man’s nature is innately good.
Biblical Model	Man’s nature is corrupted by depravity.

48. 2 Timothy 3:7, “Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of truth.”

Democratic Model Parents encourage freedom of expression.

Biblical Model Parental restraint leads to responsible behavior.

Democratic Model Conflict is bad, so conflict avoidance is good.

Biblical Model Conflict is natural, so conflict resolution is good.

Democratic Model Parental authority is bad.

Biblical Model Parental authority is God-given, and parents should exercise it wisely.

THE GREAT TRANSITION

By the mid-1950s, the fallacy of the innate goodness of man was securely positioned in American universities. But as hard as adherents tried, they could not get that theory out of the classroom and into American homes. The status quo, Judeo/Christian traditions, were too strongly entrenched.

Eventually, the time was right for the great transition. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a combination of factors came together to bring about social change and the banishment of the parenting practices left us by our forefathers. Three of these factors were:

1. Post-depression and World War II youth were sent off to college by parents who saw education as the doorway to happiness and success.
2. Humanists had completely taken over higher education.
3. American, Bible-based churches were complacent toward the resulting secular drift.

These combined elements provided the catalyst that brought about the turmoil of the late 1960s. As a result, a new parenting generation was willing to leave their historical, Judeo/Christian roots to embrace the “natural way” of the child. At that time, democratic parenting theories leaped over the walls of academia and implanted themselves into the mainstream of American thought.

Democratic parenting is a sugarcoated, marketing title that masks the removal of parental authority necessary for child guidance. Sponsors of these concepts used words such as partnership, equality, and mutuality to describe

the parent/child union. By attacking parental authority, democratic theorists removed the primary external force that brings the needed moral conformity. They told those of us who parented during the first stages of the democratic era that children need to see adults as their friends not as authority figures; they need to see parents as their buddies, not as governors. We were told to “baby proof” our homes to avoid stifling and perverting our child’s natural way. Even Hollywood got into the act. The TV show, *The Courtship of Eddie’s Father*, with its theme song declaring, “Let me tell you about my best friend,” modeled the ideals of democratic parenting, and David Carradine in TV’s *Kung Fu* prompted us to become more like his character, Grasshopper, who was “one with nature.”

The practice of befriending our children at the expense of parental authority has destroyed one generation and is about to start on a second. When parents remove the God-ordained pattern of authority in the family and deny the biblical affirmation of man’s nature, chaos descends on both the home and society. Without the exercise of authority, there is no external pressure to bring about moral conformity. Without the exercise of parental authority, we experience the moral equivalent of the Tower of Babel—a society of confounded and confused people with everyone speaking a different moral language.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

One’s view of human nature directs one’s theories. We believe those who advocate a democratic style of parenting do so at the expense of biblical truth. They are promoting what they would like the nature of children to be rather than what it actually is. Human nature and nature are two distinctly different things. Christians should respect nature but not idealize it or attempt to reduce man to a natural process.

Children need authority in their lives—biblical authority. For the Christian, the exercise of authority is not an option but a divine mandate to carry out for the good of the child. At the onset of their lives, children need to see their parents as loving and authoritative. If parents establish their right to rule during the early years, they will reap the rewards of friendship with their children when they are grown.