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AN EMERGENT THEORY OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

by
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There is no pretension, on my part, that the mode to be utilized in this paper or the theory to be presented is THE MODEL or THE THEORY OF ethical behavior. The model and the theory represent in my mind principles upon which we may open the way for more systematic investigation of ethical behavior than has been allowed by models and theories previously developed. However, it should be said that there is behind the thoughts in this paper the firm belief that somewhere within the boundaries delineated will arise insights closer to the truth of what ethical behavior is and is like than have been provided by models or theories previously presented.

This paper will lift the concept of epigenesis from embryology and will apply it to the field of ethics. The theory will be derived from the organismic point of view of Rousseau, Smuts, Schweitzer, Lecky, Goldstein, Maslow, et. al. These will be reinterpreted within Krech's concept of Dynamic Neurological Systems and the General Systems point of view of Bertalanffy. The paper will proceed as follows: First, I shall express the reasons why a different model and a different theory are needed. Then, I will defend this position by a limited examination of existing models and existing theories.

Next, from the examination of models previously used and theories previously expressed I shall derive the criteria which must be met by a more adequate theory of ethical behavior. And in turn, I will present more details as to my theoretical position, why this position is taken, my basic assumptions, how I am attempting to conceive of ethical behavior, the proposed model for representing ethical behavior and the proposed theory of ethical behavior.

A subsequent paper will present the author's speculations as to the nature of the emergent ethical systems hypothesized therein. First, let us see why new models are needed.

". . . if we demand that the study of human morals be a closely integrated synthesis of empirical data with a rigorous theory underlying it, then we have not taken the first step toward a science of character (1, p. 410)."

". . . if we are to solve the problems of peace and war between alliances, ideologies, nations, labor and management; if we are to solve the problems of race relations, character development, crime and the like, we must recognize that they will be solved only by the decisions of

individuals and only if the decisions are based on substantive knowledge and only if the individuals who make such decisions are ethically sensitive and ethically mature (2,p)." (Slightly modified by the writer).

These words of Bonner and the *World Book Encyclopedia* indicates two reasons why we need additional theories of ethical behavior based upon different models. (In a subsequent paper describing the theorized ethical systems other reasons will be discussed). First, as Bonner says, we do not have a basic scientific knowledge of ethics and second, as the other words say, we can't make inroads into ethical problems because we lack the knowledge necessary to solve such problems. Some will disagree with these points because they do not believe our problem is to find what ethical behavior is like. These people believe our problem is to learn how to develop the ethically sensitive and ethically mature decision maker. There is no doubt that many people assume that they know what ethical behavior is and it is true that these people are trying to produce what they consider to be the ethically mature decision maker. Some, like Blatz (), see values as arbitrarily determined by the older generation and see the task for those wishing to produce ethically mature decision makers to consist of choosing the desired set of values, then setting out relentlessly to stamp them in. Others such as Ligon and his co-workers take a more cautious approach. They have subscribed to a set of ethical values which they believe if incorporated would produce the ethically mature and ethically sensitive human being. Unlike those who try to relentlessly stamp in prescribed values the Character Research

Project is carefully attempting to determine how to gradually develop the so called embryonic and fetal conditions and attitudes which would lead eventually to the mature ethical values of the ethically sensitive decision makers. Perhaps ethical values are not arbitrarily determined. Perhaps we are wrong when we say the Communists are unethical. Perhaps we don't have the knowledge necessary to understand their ethical systems. Perhaps we could handle our problems with them better if we understood their ethics. Perhaps we could make more progress in many areas if we sought knowledge of what ethical behavior is like rather than continue to operate within what may be false premises.

There are those who will say that these arguments are ridiculous and this they will support by pointing to the libraries laden down with tomes on ethics. Surely, one must agree, that there is no shortage of information as to what people feel is ethical behavior or feel about ethical behavior, but one must ask how much of this information is more than argument, opinion or just a priority presumptive? An examination of this literature supported Bonner's statement that there is a dearth of information about ethical behavior which is based upon systematic research. And an investigation of this material suggested five reasons why systematic research based information is scarce.