

# **RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

## **(The CCE and its Involvement in Social Change)**

**Fred Emery  
and  
Merrelyn Emery**

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*Note from ME: this little paper like that discussing the meanings of 'ideology' was part response to the protracted effort to denigrate and irretrievably damage our work. Many claims such as ideological and irresponsible were thrown around as a group within the ANU, and indeed the CCE, tried to wipe OST out of the Centre for Continuing Education. Fred wrote the first version which we revised and reissued the following year.*

When educationalists and social scientists get involved in changing people, individually or collectively, the question must arise about *their* responsibilities in the change. I agree with Isidor Chein<sup>1</sup> that it is enough to define this responsibility in terms of *adjustment* or in terms of *human happiness*. Neither of these criteria would protect us from behaving irresponsibly.

If we believe that the individual constitutes a higher order of humanity than his institutions the objective of adjustment would always leave us open to actions that could contribute to man's degradation. Thus, helping a bureaucracy be more effective by training or conditioning its members to adjust to the life it provides would only open the way to the bureaucracy to further constrain individual choice.

If the objective were happiness, let us see what this would entail in the world of work. First, our prime concern would be with "job satisfaction". We know that dissatisfactions with work are most commonly determined by lacks in the so-called hygiene factors ( e.g. relative pay, physical conditions, safety) or lacks in the quality of the work itself. We know also that these common sources of dissatisfaction can be offset by eliminating the lacks in hygiene conditions and by putting into the work such qualities as optimal challenge, variety, companionship, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Chein, I. "Psychotherapy and the image of man", *Book Forum*, I, 1974, p.119-208.

Making changes in real income, actual working temperatures and the like costs real money. Putting quality into work makes for real changes in the distribution of power. However, if our basic objective is happiness it does not necessarily entail more than that, for the individual, we reduce his dissatisfactions or induce euphoria.

A “happiness pill” could do all of this without needing massive erosion of the autocratic structures or massive capital investments or diversion of potential capital into wages. More than that, such a pill, like the birth control pill, would be a profitable self-financing industry and it would soon recoup its initial outlay for research. If this sounds like science fiction, we need only to ponder on the following:

- a. what was behind the fantastic growth in use of tranquillisers?
- b. how much of the usage of alcohol and other euphoria producing drugs is work related?

There are some practical difficulties. Some work in the society is always going to be too important to allow the pill-pushers to do it. Hence, some people would have to be selected out and protected from the need for or the temptations of the happiness pill. On the other side, the demand for the pill could be stimulated by *not* improving bad jobs and letting good ones deteriorate.

This objective of human happiness could thus lead us toward Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and the soma pill. It is partly realized in the current U.S. civilization. It is the tradition of coco leaf chewing of the Andean Indians. If we are not to be guided by the objectives of *adjustment* and *happiness* then what?

Do we fall back on just accepting the objectives defined by those who seek our assistance, provided it is within our competence and not outside our ethical codes? This would imply that we can be helpful only with means, not objectives. However, what are objectives in one context are only means in another. It would seem to me that neglecting to help with the definition of objectives when we are able to do so is a *prima facie* case of irresponsibility.

Some time ago, 1966, C. West Churchman and I spelt out why we thought that help could only be responsibility given to another when there were clearly identified values and ideals. Our experience led us to believe that in practice such values could usually be identified but we certainly did not feel able to specify any generally relevant values. We did not even distinguish between values and ideals. In the paper that I am so far following Isidor Chein specifies what it would mean if we were guided in our attempts to help by the ideal of humanity “the image of fully humanized man” (p. 206). Thus, guided our objectives would be, in order of priority:

1. Increase the range and variety of relevant considerations to which the individual is responsible, thus making possible more intelligent behaviour.
2. To promote a love of freedom and intolerance of oppression.
3. To foster and support purposive and ideal-seeking behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

At the root of this ideal are the ideals of homonomy and nurturance (Emery *et al*, 1974, 1976). They basically assert that within these guidelines it must be taken as axiomatic that “no man is an island unto himself”, (from the English poet John Donne, who lived in a time like this).

It remains for us to ask whether the fourth ideal of *beauty* is relevant to these considerations. The normal feeling is that nothing could be so remote from helping people with their ordinary day-to-day lives. Maybe, however, this is just because we have come to accept that the mundane and everyday are as dull as dish-water, and as ugly. Maybe instead we should accept as a guideline that we should not willingly help in ways that would degrade any evolving complex in child town, society or nature, just because it has no means-value to us. Our in-built capability to sense in disorder is, we believe, what beauty and the pursuit of beauty is about. We do not think we can be soundly guided in accepting responsibility for social change unless we are guided not only by what we know to be humane, but also by what intuit to be beautiful, what to be ugly, what to stink. Such intuitions could be proven to be wrong as often as our fancy theories about box-girders or about the atmosphere on Venus. That would prove nothing. Judgements about beauty need not, even now, be entirely intuitive, but in any case such judgements are necessary part of the decisions we are discussing. It would be better to make such judgements and be wrong than not to make them at all.

In conclusion, let me be quite clear that we are not suggesting that happiness should be avoided or that adjustment is necessarily undesirable. What is being stated is that the overriding objective must have to do with the dignity of man. To achieve this a lot can be sacrificed or put up with. But to achieve it in such a way that the dignity of collaborators is not only diminished, but also it positively enhanced two further conditions are necessary. The first is that the relationship must be a genuinely collaborative and participative<sup>3</sup> one. This means that the process itself must be a mirror of the sought objectives. The second condition follows the first in that collaborators must be provided with or given access to the conceptual (and other) knowledge that is held by the agent. Without the ability to conceptualize and verbalize any practical changes, the collaborators will be in the position of being

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<sup>2</sup> The wording is largely ours. Chein was taking off the language of B.F. Skinner in order to make a point.

<sup>3</sup> See *Future We're in*, Epilogue, Fred Emery *et al.*, CCE, 1974.

manipulated and subject to the objectives of others. To deny the opportunity to conceptualize change is to preclude true learning which can be used in future occasions, and is therefore to rob others of their dignity.