

SUMMARY

*For Your Own Good* by Alice Miller

I have selected the foregoing passages in order to characterize an attitude that reveals itself more or less openly, not only in Fascism but in other ideologies as well. The scorn and abuse directed at the helpless child as well as the suppression of vitality, creativity, and feeling in the child and in oneself permeate so many areas of our life that we hardly notice it anymore. Almost everywhere we find the effort, marked by varying degrees of intensity and by the use of various coercive measures, to rid ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within us—i.e., the weak, helpless, dependent creature—in order to become an independent, competent adult deserving of respect. When we reencounter this creature in our children, we persecute it with the same measures once used on ourselves. And this is what we are accustomed to call "child-rearing."

In the following pages I shall apply the term "poisonous pedagogy" to this very complex endeavor. It will be clear from

"Poisonous Pedagogy"

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the context in question which of its many facets I am emphasizing at the moment. The specific facets can be derived directly from the preceding quotations from child-rearing manuals. These passages teach us that:

1. Adults are the masters (not the servants!) of the dependent child.
2. They determine in godlike fashion what is right and what is wrong.
3. The child is held responsible for their anger.
4. The parents must always be shielded.
5. The child's life-affirming feelings pose a threat to the autocratic adult.
6. The child's will must be "broken" as soon as possible.
7. All this must happen at a very early age, so the child "won't notice" and will therefore not be able to expose the adults.

*How Child-Rearing Crushes Spontaneous Feelings*

The methods that can be used to suppress vital spontaneity in the child are: laying traps, lying, duplicity, subterfuge, manipulation, "scare" tactics, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliating and disgracing the child, scorn, ridicule, and coercion even to the point of torture.

It is also a part of "poisonous pedagogy" to impart to the child from the beginning false information and beliefs that have been passed on from generation to generation and dutifully accepted by the young even though they are not only unproven but are demonstrably false. Examples of such beliefs are:

1. A feeling of duty produces love.
2. Hatred can be done away with by forbidding it.
3. Parents deserve respect simply because they are parents.
4. Children are undeserving of respect simply because they are children.
5. Obedience makes a child strong.
6. A high degree of self-esteem is harmful.
7. A low degree of self-esteem makes a person altruistic.
8. Tenderness (doting) is harmful.
9. Responding to a child's needs is wrong.
10. Severity and coldness are a good preparation for life.
11. A pretense of gratitude is better than honest ingratitude.
12. The way you behave is more important than the way you really are.
13. Neither parents nor God would survive being offended.
14. The body is something dirty and disgusting.
15. Strong feelings are harmful.
16. Parents are creatures free of drives and guilt.
17. Parents are always right.