

My name is Courtenay Young; I am a UK Body Psychotherapist; and my presentation is entitled:

## **“Reich’s Ideas on Child-Rearing”**

I could also add “**Then and Now**”

I am delighted to be able to join in with you all in this:

**Wilhelm Reich Museum’s: 2020 Online Summer Conference-**

***Wilhelm Reich's Work with Infants and Children: Then and Now***

### **Introduction**

Let me state something very clearly from the start: **Wilhelm Reich himself had an absolutely atrocious and devastating childhood, early life, and upbringing.** One could not imagine a worse set of circumstances. Yet, what I find is quite amazing is that he was not destroyed by these events, but he was actually able to develop some very positive (even radical) ideas about how society should be and about positive healthy child-rearing. So, how come? Maybe Nietzsche was right, “*What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.*”

Reich was exceptionally brilliant – as he was able to synthesise the many aspects of his own experiences, of political and social reform, of new forms of educational theory, over time into a reasonably coherent whole.

Mostly, Reich’s ideas about children’s upbringing were mostly just ideas – or ideals – and only a very few of them were actually based on either personal, political or professional experience, or on having been put into practice successfully. Yet, there was something very special about Reich. His second wife, Ilse Ollendorf, wrote in the introduction to her (1969) biography of him:

*He was a man of great contradictions ... He was gentle with children – all through his life he maintained a wonderful immediate contact with children – and he was patient when he felt a situation or a person required patience. But he could [also] be the stern, impatient, awe-inspiring person ... especially with his assistants and co-workers.*

However, his ideas (or his ideals) about a “natural” form of child-rearing never manifested properly. Part of his personal tragedy was that he could never find the ‘right’ people to help him to do this (in the right place at the right time); and he always had very high ideals. These feelings led – somewhat characteristically – to:

*his belief that: “every physician, teacher or social worker who will have to deal with children must show proof that he or she ... is sex-economically healthy and that he has acquired an exact knowledge of infantile and adolescent sexuality. That is, training in sex-economy must be obligatory for physicians and teacher.”*

Whilst these points might have been obviously desirable – and he probably has a very valid point – i.e. that people working with children ought to be “orgonomically” healthy – it is also incredibly idealistic, as it is difficult to see these qualities being accepted as something like a universal “professional competency”, but ...

Reich’s concerns about society were also centred more with the impact of the parents on the children: “... *there is still no law for the protection of new-born infants [either] against the parents’ inability to bring up children or against the parents’ neurotic influences.*”

### **Society Inevitably Shapes Us**

Reich comes back to this psycho-social theme again and again: the neuroses of the parents, caused by a sexually repressive society, then cause corresponding neuroses in their children. Therefore, there is a series of transgenerational traumas that have become generated – caused primarily by: # poor environment; # poverty; # ignorance; # bad social conditioning; and # fear – and very few people manage to escape these successfully, so as to emerge reasonably whole.

It follows that – as I hope to be able to show you –after trying to help such damaged people heal their psychic wounds, through psychoanalysis; radical politics; working-class clinics; and eventually body-oriented psychotherapy and orgone therapy – Reich eventually began to focus on issues about better education and upbringing in childhood, which might be able to moderate – or ameliorate – any negative parental influences, and thus hopefully produce a better, more independent and free-thinking set of children to be the next generation.

So, in this presentation, we have to skip forward in Reich’s history to 1922, when, at the age 25, he had survived the traumas of his horrible childhood and adolescence as well as the (reportedly) horrific 3-years of army service in World War 1 on the Austrian-Italian Front. He was living in a ‘Victorian’ post-industrial revolutionary era; with years of hyper-inflation; in the capital city of a major Empire, which had suffered an almost unimaginable defeat; followed by a horrendous pandemic.

By the end of 1922, he had become qualified as a doctor and had started his somewhat amazing psycho-analytic career, all of which has been very well documented elsewhere.

There is absolutely no doubt that he loved – and cared for – the two daughters (Eva & Lore) that he had with his wife Annie: even though he did not have a great deal to do with their upbringing, which was quite typical of those times. Reich always kept himself very

busy, possibly even being something of a workaholic and he was described as having an “*almost ferocious appetite for hard work*”.<sup>[1]</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Boadella, D. (1973). *Wilhelm Reich: The Evolution of his Work*. London: Vision. (p. 9)

## Social Activism

As a result of these all world-wide disasters and recent social upheavals, nearly everyone's ... *élan vital*, their *esprit de vie*, their *raison d'être*, and their 'libido', had effectively become suffocated, suppressed and virtually squeezed out of them. Such people also had no real opportunities to develop healthier social attitudes, especially about sex, or any form of expression of their sexuality in their adult lives – due primarily to their prevailing economic and social conditions. Reich's views – on studying this population – would have been influenced by their social and emotional ill-health.

But – then as ever – these changes formed much of the intense focus that Reich had – as he developed his interests along the lines of increased basic health, better social conditions, basic education (especially about sexuality), and much more of a focus on vitality (libido). All relevant then – and it is still as necessary – if not essential – for any person's future emotional and mental health.

These same basic issues still apply for our children's future, and for our children's, children's future – and so, the proper question really is: "*How can we possibly 'protect' and 'ensure' something of this natural potential, which has been and still is– currently – being suppressed?*" What can we learn from Reich – and others since him – and how can we apply these ideas now in ways that are relevant for the '*Children of the Future*'?

Reich had – quite early on – developed fairly radical views about what happens in a conventional family marriage and how devastating the effects of this can be:

*This sexual suppression of the children by their parents, to which is added the intellectual suppression by the school, the spiritual stultification by the Church, and finally the material suppression and exploitation by employer of employee, is the primary source of youth people's emotional and sexual misery.* <sup>[2]</sup>

He wrote in his book, '*People in Trouble*' about a large number of socio-political issues of concern. However, with these views, however radical they might seem, he was still somewhat 'swimming' very much within the 'intellectual, left-wing mainstream' of those times.

*In simple narrative form, he recounts his personal experiences with major social and political events and ideas, and reveals how these experiences gradually led him to an awareness of the deep significance of the human character structure in shaping and responding to the social process.*

Reich's views about the upbringing of children varied quite considerably over time – from the 1920s (when he stressed the importance of social care and communal upbringing, and he

---

<sup>2</sup> Reich, Wilhelm (1983). *The Children of the Future*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux (p. 215)

seemed to want state participation, through laws concerning maternity leave, child support and the provision of day-care) – none of which were available in those days – to other (later) times, when he would even call for the abolition of the family structure:

*“...the prevention of neuroses begins by excluding from the education of the child from his or her own parents, who have proven themselves to be the most unqualified educators.”*

In 1929, Reich and Annie had visited Russia for a few weeks on a lecture tour to see the “first socialist society” in practice, and Reich had returned, convinced that sexual misery and economic exploitation were inextricably linked. There, he was very impressed by a psychoanalytically-oriented educator, Vera Schmidt, who ran a “children’s collective” in Moscow. Later, Reich dropped the concept of excluding the parents from children’s upbringing, but he put greater emphasis on the difference between a “natural family” and then (more usual) “compulsive family”, whereby ...

*“... the “natural family” was nothing more (or less) than the “lasting love relationship,” where the partners had children and were responsible for them in some not too clear combination with social facilities [available] such as day-care centres.<sup>[3]</sup>*

Reich was living in socially tumultuous times. In 1929, he had written a pamphlet for adolescents, *Sexual Excitation and Sexual Satisfaction* (which was banned shortly afterwards), and then – much later – revised and re-published into *The Sexual Struggle of Youth*. In this pamphlet, he simply and clearly described some of their issues:

- \* that the young be completely scientifically enlightened about everything about sexual life;*
- \* that contraception be distributed free of charge through health insurance;*
- \* that the sexual life of unmarried youth be considered in housing allocations;*
- \* that the laws against abortion be completely rescinded;*
- \* that marriage be able to be dissolved when a partner no longer wants to remain married;*
- \* that there be no distinction between the married and unmarried.<sup>[4]</sup>*

It is (perhaps) interesting to note that during this period in his life (from 1930 towards the end of the 1930s) – Reich had gone through several quite severe and traumatic events, which had probably led to several (or significant) “personality changes”. And all of these ‘personal’ and ‘existential’ traumas might have – or probably had – created a significant number of changes in Reich’s basic attitudes: certainly, towards political and professional ‘organisations’;

---

<sup>3</sup> Sharaf, Myron (1983). *Fury on Earth: A biography of Wilhelm Reich*. London: Andre Deutsch (p. 142).

<sup>4</sup> From Philip Bennett’s 2019 talk and a article “*On Reich’s Social and Political Development: Treatment, Cure and the Patriarchal Family*”: available: [www.psychorgone.com/sociology/on-reichs-social-and-political-development-treatment-cure-and-the-patriarchal-family](http://www.psychorgone.com/sociology/on-reichs-social-and-political-development-treatment-cure-and-the-patriarchal-family)

towards other ‘people’; probably towards ‘women’; and possibly even also towards ‘children’.

However, back-tracking a little, the most significant event – according to the theme of this presentation – that happened during his 5-year stay in Norway – was that, in 1936, Reich met up with A.S. Neill. This was like the meeting of two halves of a whole.

### **Freedom not Licence**

A.S. Neill was a Scottish school-teacher who had founded a progressive school, “Summerhill”, in England in 1924, and, during the next decade (and also again in the 1960’s and 70’s), his educational work gained considerable world-wide notoriety.

Neill had begun to develop his thoughts about: **(a)** the futility of ‘enforced’ education (which was then the predominant model world-wide), and **(b)** the developed axiom that all (proper) learning comes – only – from **a basis of intrinsic interest and actual experience**.

Neill’s main philosophy was: **(c)** that children (as a fundamental part of human nature) were innately good; and **(d)** that children became naturally ‘just’ and ‘virtuous’, when allowed to grow without inhibitions – and especially without adults imposing *their* morality on them; and **(e)** if left free of these constraints, children would naturally become self-regulating, and reasonable, ethical adults.

Like Reich, Neill blamed a “sick and unhappy” society for its widespread, inter-generational misery, repressions, and psychological disorders. Neill’s prescription was “*Freedom, not Licence*” and his educational method at Summerhill was a congenial form of “self-governance” – by the children, without too much interference from the adults.

In 1936, just before Neill gave a lecture in Oslo that Reich attended, Neill had read a copy of Reich’s (1933) *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, which had excited him, and – after the lecture – they met up over dinner and immediately ‘bonded’.

Neill (almost immediately) asked Reich if he (Neill) could become his Reich’s student or patient. “*Reich agreed, and Neill, fourteen years Reich’s senior, became not only Reich’s patient over the next two years but also his good friend until Reich’s death.*”<sup>[5]</sup> They met regularly over the next 2 – 3 years.

This meeting – between Reich and Neill – stimulated a whole new area of interest for them both. Reich had always been concerned about how to prevent neuroses in children and adolescents; and not just about trying to find new ways to heal the resultant neuroses in

---

<sup>5</sup> Sharaf (1983). p. 232.

adults. Neill was very interested in Reich's psychological work and how this might help to heal long-held neuroses.

At that time, there wasn't much room in his life to put into practice and develop many of his educational concepts. In his psychiatric work, he had often focussed on pregenital issues, but his educational interests gradually led him to consider the problems of infants and issues of childhood development. It was actually one of his Norwegian psychiatric colleagues, Tage Philipson, who coined the phrase "self-regulation" in an article on "Sex-economic Upbringing". However, most of these concepts about the upbringing of children were – at that time – (for Reich and many others) mostly intellectual. Sharaf writes:

*Just as in therapy, Reich was now concentrating on release of emotions and not ideas, fantasies, or the content of experiences, so – in education – his attention now became riveted by how the flow of feeling had come to be blocked in the first place and how this blockage might be prevented.*

When A.S. Neill said that children should be free, he did not mean complete freedom (or licence to do anything they like) but freedom **without** licence – i.e. that everyone can do as they like – and here is the key point – **unless such action encroaches upon another's freedom**. Adults could and should – of course – protect children from danger, but should not trample on their sense of their self, or threaten their self-regulation.

### **Life in America**

Reich's gradually increasing interest in children's upbringing and the prevention of childhood pathologies eventually all came together some years later around the birth of his son, Peter, in 1944; born to his new (American) wife, Ilse Ollendorf.

In America, Reich was being faced with a radically different and constantly changing social environment. Even before the USA's somewhat late entry into the war after Pearl Harbour (in Dec. 1941) – the involvement of America in the war had massive social and economic repercussions.

In the several years after Reich's arrival in America, from late 1939 to about 1950, Reich found himself being involved with a number of different issues. Many of which would have / could have / and probably did have / a significant effect on his views about people, society, and especially child-rearing.

These events were all severe – and had an almost fatal – sort of "distraction" from Reich's developing interest in several other topics – specifically – and especially given the point of this presentation – the effects on children and in childhood development, and

therefore in the possible **prevention** of neuroses by wide-spread changes in childhood rearing practices, their education and upbringing.

Reich had already established the Orgonomic Infant Research Centre (OIRC) in 1949, with the declared aims of preventing (physiological & muscular) armouring in children – from birth – and after. (Philip Bennet spoke about this eloquently in the first of these Conference presentations). However, the OIRC was – eventually, not very successful. It is Reich's book, *Children of the Future* which is therefore a sort of legacy, as is the extract from his will, published at the beginning of this book, from which I quote:

*I have throughout all of my lifetime loved infants and children and adolescents, and I also was always loved and understood by them. Infants used to smile at me because I had deep contact with them, and children of two or three very often used to become thoughtful and serious when they looked at me ... (This section concludes) ... I hope to have contributed my good share to their future happiness.*<sup>6]</sup>

## **Reich & Neill**

Seventy years ago, in 1950, at the end of August, in Organon, Reich opened the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Orgonomic Conference, with these words:

*The fate of the human race will be shaped by the character structures of the "Children of the Future". In their hands and hearts, the great decisions will lie. They will have to clean up the mess of this twentieth century. This concerns us who are living today in the middle of this great mess.*

Now, as mentioned, Reich had become great friends with A.S. Neill. In the 20 years of their friendship, they exchanged over 500 letters. Before the outbreak of World War 2 in September 1939, Neill had travelled to Norway in every 'school' vacation for two years to meet with Reich and to work with him as a patient. They had then corresponded during the War and, when Neill made his first trip to the USA in 1947, he visited Reich at Organon and he also visited Reich again in the next year in 1948. Neill wrote,

*"... the joy of meeting Reich was a great one. On both sides was joy. In his cabin in Organon, Maine, we sat late into the night, usually sipping Scotch or rye, and smoking innumerable Chesterfields. ... We had long arguments when we both got excited and always in the end we laughed and one of us said: 'Pass the bottle'."*<sup>[7]</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Reich, in his last (1957) Will and Testament, dedicated all of his future revenues to 'The Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust', which operates the Wilhelm Reich Museum in Rangeley, Maine; and also manages Reich's archives.

<sup>7</sup> Boadella, 1973, p. 376.



Contained within the same long article, which was quoted in full as an appendix to Boadella's book, Neill gives us an excellent look at Reich's complexity:

*Yet [Reich] was so charitable about people. One of his sayings was: 'Everyone is right in some way'. But any attack on his work met with rage; there was no turning the other cheek when plague merchants smeared his work. He had a quick and strong temper and did not try to disguise or restrain it. With it went a wonderful capacity for softness and tenderness. To see him with his boy Peter, when he was five or six was a delight. I recall one day when Peter had been most difficult, anti-social, destructive, a real problem child. Reich was baffled and so was I. Suddenly he burst out laughing: 'Here we have the greatest schoolmaster in the world and the greatest psychologist ... and the two of us can't do a damn thing about the kid'.*

Neill also said that Reich had told him that he had no immediate hopes of his ideas being widely accepted in his lifetime:

*"It will take a thousand years till humanity realises that it has taken the wrong path. Crimes and wars and cancer will one day be tackled by mankind as proofs of a wrong way of living".*

But we need – again – to focus back to Reich's ideas about children, child-care and children's education. In February 1950, Neill and Reich started to discuss the possibility of Neill moving to America and setting up a nursery school in Organon (as the finances of Neill's Summerhill School were – as always – in fairly dire straits). This correspondence is published in "*Record of a Friendship*". Reich had replied very positively as his ...

*"work in bio-energetics and prevention of armouring has, naturally, more and more been centered on newborn infants. The idea of organizing and building a home for infants and small children at Organon, where plenty of space is available and where the population is friendly, grew by leaps and bounds."*

In the same letter, he specifically offered Neill the directorship of a children's home at Organon. Neill wrote back, hoping that they could meet up again that August to discuss the details. A.S. Neill went on to write about some of the more practical difficulties of having young infants at Organon without their parents:

*"... up to the age of at least 5, the infants would need to be with their mothers for love and warmth. And even if they began at 5, I think mothers and fathers in N.Y. would hesitate to send their kids to a home [school] 500 miles away."*

Reich wrote back that they had plans to start building a children's home that summer and he asked Neill to help with their plans as a model for a training school for the OIRC nursery and kindergarten teachers. Reich then wrote more about the aims of OIRC,

*"... grouped around two basic issues: (a) the natural laws of self-regulation in newborn babies before the armouring sets in; (b) the hate of armored living beings against the natural-given living principles in the baby."*

Neill then started to back out of these plans as he realised that he would effectively be abandoning his school, Summerhill, which he felt was something of a ‘sinking ship’, and he could not in honesty make it across to the 1950 Summer Conference in Organon, despite Reich’s offer to pay Neill’s passage. Neill was eventually refused a visa.

Looking at the frequent letters exchanged between them (almost every few days) throughout 1950, it becomes reasonably clear – to me – **that Reich had invested most of his views about children, and their early years, and their education and upbringing, into A.S. Neill’s work and thinking** – and this investment allowed Reich, in turn, to focus – almost entirely – on the effects of children’s physical and emotional health, as dictated by Orgonomy; on his research and teaching work at Organon; in the sociological and political aspects of his work that he depicts in writings like, “*The Murder of Christ*”; and the production and distribution of Orgone Energy Accumulators; on his experiments in weather control that led to the disastrous “*Oranur Experiment*”; and also on his astro-physical and ‘cosmic’ research.

What also became clear from these letters was that he had started planning his book on “*Children of the Future*” – which, in fact, he never finished.

## OIRC

I have already mentioned Reich’s institute, the OIRC. The first two founding principles had been implemented; the third principle was the prevention of armouring. Reich wrote:

*Prevention of armouring would not appear necessary if our children could grow up as nature or “God” has prescribed. It has been firmly established that organisms which function according to the law of nature are free of biopathies ...*

There is a lot of scientific (social and anthropological) evidence that can support this Utopian hypothesis. Many theorists, like Rousseau (in his 1762 book, *Emile: On Education*) or Samuel Butler’s 1872 book, *Erewhon*, make similar claims, though on different bases. As a social animal, we can all dream ourselves back to the *Garden of Eden*, where there is no knowledge of good or evil; or we can try and escape to a hidden *Shangri La*; or we can hope for a future *Golden Age*. Reich then makes a very valid point:

*... However, before the discovery of the organismic orgone energy nobody knew what the “law of nature” looked like exactly. Like other animals, children are born everywhere without armoring. This constitutes the firmest foundation of mental hygiene, far better than any attempts at a later date to disarm the human animal or to prevent armoring. Yet, this natural principle is continuously drowned out by other views which make it ineffective. We must ask how this could happen. There are several ways: ...”*

At this point, we are getting very close to Reich's ideas about child-rearing – more or less from his own words. The single, quick, simplistic, easy answer is: ... that Neill's (and Reich's) ideas were – essentially – that – left almost entirely to themselves – children are totally wholesome, self-empowered, self-regulated, unneurotic, and have “*all the richness of natural plasticity and development*”. Reich continues:

*This infant is not, as so many erroneously believe, an empty sack or a chemical machine into which everybody and anybody can pour his or her special ideas of what a human being ought to be. ... The basic task of all education, directed by interest in the child and not by interest in party programs, profit, church, etc., is to remove every obstacle in the way of this naturally given productivity and plasticity of the biological energy.*

*Here, for the first time, we have found a positive and broad base of operation. These [future] children will have to choose their own ways and determine their own fates. We must learn from them instead of forcing upon them our own cockeyed ideas and malicious practices, which have now been shown in every new generation to be most damaging and ridiculous. LET THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES DECIDE THEIR OWN FUTURE. Our task is to protect their natural powers to do so.”*

This set of views is perhaps somewhat simplistic, but it is also quite radical, revolutionary, preposterous. It is also frustratingly idealistic.

So that was ‘Then’ and we are, of course, also considering the ‘Now’. In such a ‘conference’ as we are in today, we have to ask ourselves the very serious question – not only about Reich's views about child-rearing, but also how these impact on our views about rearing the ‘*Children of the Future*’. The real question is therefore ... “*How do we / can we help to bring this about - today?*” – ‘this’ being the realisation of their proper potential and it is a very serious current-day problem.

As things are, at present, in these weird and wonderful times, there is a massive amount of fear; there are also lots of questions from the anxious – and there are a lot of powerful feelings from both the convinced and from the antagonistic – but there is – as yet – no proper widespread understanding of any answers.

What is even worse is that only a relatively small percentage of people across the planet currently seem concerned enough to stand up and speak out. Perhaps, the greatest problem that we face is a degree of short-sightedness, ignorance and/or apathy: as well as lack of co-operation, which might include wars, famines, and things like that proliferate, etc. If we are to have a future, or, more properly, if our children are to have a future, then

something has to change – quite radically – and also very quickly. This concept, albeit an emergency one, is absolutely critical – if our children are to have a future.

### **Children of the Future**

So, I believe that, currently and significantly our main issue is (being guided by Reich and Neill – and many others since them) – more precisely – how to ‘ensure’ that these “Children of the Future” actually have a future. Global warming; the increased use of pesticides; the over-use of fossil fuels; the spread of plastic into all parts of our environment; an increasing use of toxic drugs and pharmaceuticals; an ever-increasing global over-population; as well as almost overwhelming social problems and crises; as well as abuses of social media and the internet; are all pushing us – irrevocably – towards a severely increasing risk of ... (if not an actual disaster, almost certainly a severe and potentially existential) ... crisis for the whole of humanity: indeed, the possible extinction of – not only our present society – but also of the extinction of the human (and many other) species.

The current social and political structures – of nuclear families and separate nation states (often competing against each other) – just does not work! We – humans – have also tried a wide variety of social experiments of living together, many times and in many different ways, for well over 6,000 years – most largely unsuccessfully – and so we have now got ourselves into this present, unsustainable and dire situation.

What we tend to call “ordinary upbringing” just seems to promote further wars, human misery, social class differentiations, wider divisions of wealth and privilege, religious fanaticism, ‘popularistic’ opinions, anti-social attitudes, refugees, pollution, an absence of well-being, etc. ... and now many forms of life (besides human) throughout the whole planet are being threatened with mass extinction.

However, whether the causes are historical, transgenerational, genetic, or whatever – the question still remains: “*What can we do about it? Now? And Pretty Damn Quickly*” – especially according to the predictions of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#)! <sup>[8]</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. Its predictions: Scientists have high confidence that global temperatures will continue to rise for decades to come, largely due to greenhouse gases produced by human activities. By the end of this century, what have been once-in- 20-year extreme heat days (one-day events) are projected to occur every two or three years over most of the nation. Hurricane-associated storm intensity and rainfall rates are projected to increase as the climate continues to warm. Global sea level has risen by about 8 inches since reliable record keeping began in 1880. It is projected to rise another 1 to 4 feet by

The current / forthcoming ‘Extinction Event’ certainly won’t be the first time that there have been mass extinctions on this planet <sup>[9]</sup>, but this will be the first ‘un-natural’ one: all the others that have happened are usually ascribed to ‘Acts of Nature’ or ‘Acts of God’. However, we may view this current one – the “Holocene” (or “Anthropocene”) extinction – it will be irrevocably due to an ‘Act of Man’.

Therefore, whatever we have been doing, as a dominant species – to date – has therefore been totally ‘wrong’ and ‘detrimental’ to the natural order of things in this sort of respect. All of our best attempts – to date – have certainly not succeeded in changing anything radically – so that our children, and our children’s children will probably **not** have much of a future. At this point, I would like to read you a poem that I originally wrote in 1987.

---

2100. The Arctic Ocean is expected to become essentially ice-free in summer before the mid-century and is currently the area of the globe that is heating up the fastest.

<sup>9</sup> The big five (now six) **Mass Extinctions**. ... **(1)** End Ordovician, 444 million years ago, 86% of species lost ... **(2)** Late Devonian, 375 million years ago, 75% of species lost. ... **(3)** [newly discovered] Guadalupian (or middle-Permian), 273 million years ago, 67% of terrestrial species lost... **(4)** End Permian, 251 million years ago, 96% of species lost. ... **(5)** End Triassic, 200 million years ago, 80% of species lost. ... **(6)** End Cretaceous, 66 million years ago, 76% of all species lost.

## ***What Are Our Children's Children Going To Blame Us For?***

From the wastelands and the rotten cities, I can hear their cry.  
As they gasp for air and search dry lands for clean water  
They ask the pitiless questions, " How " & "Why?"  
"Why did you use those aerosols each year?  
And did you really still drive cars in twenty twenty-four?"  
"How on earth could you so abuse the other species living here?  
And why did you go on buying - selling - making more & more?"  
***What are our children's children going to blame us for?***  
"Was there not supposed to be a total freeze  
on bombs and missiles, arms and nuclear war?"  
"And why did you let them cut down all the trees?"  
***What are our children's children going to blame us for?***  
"Please, Granddaddy, tell us truly please,  
Were there still bright sandy beaches here upon the shore?"  
***What are our children's children going to blame us for?***  
"Granny, why didn't you teach your growing boys that it's wrong to kill?"  
"Why did you go on shipping filthy oil that spills upon the seas?"  
"How did you fight to stop the factories spewing filth?"  
"Why did you lose? Did you really use up all your might?  
"Didn't the sight of aeroplanes flying, seals dying, others trying,  
hungry babies crying, move you to do more?"  
***What are our children's children going to blame us for?***  
"You say you had a dream to follow; Life was hollow,  
Spirit called and urban lifestyles palled."  
"So, you changed your name and played the Transformation Game  
or tried to get rich and beat Them at Their game:  
The result was just the bloody same."  
***What are our children's children going to blame us for?***  
"Have you no shame? Please explain exactly what you did?"  
"We feel that you should take the blame  
for letting things go on the way they did."  
***That's what our children's children are going to blame us for?***  
"It sounds as if you turned away, you went inside and tried to hide  
Felt so weak, or cried out that you were only just a few."  
"You lost the sight of all the shite that killed the trees,  
the animals, the air, the seas, the birds & bees,  
the insects and the people too."  
"My God, why did you not take hold, stay "Stop" and stop the rot?"  
***That's what our children's children are going to blame us for.***  
"You had such a lot of people, power & wealth. Yes, so much then.  
You even had your health!  
"You could have really had it made!  
But you didn't act. You wrung your hands and just delayed!"  
***That's what our children's children are going to blame us for.***  
"You made a pact with supermarket chains, the taste of wealth  
for economic gains and politician's claims that they were turning green."  
"You should have seen where all of it would end: the shape of things to come:  
Cancer, AIDS, a planetary disease called "MAN",  
plastic bags and nuclear waste, the ozone hole,  
the Greenhouse heat, Chernobyl, using up the peat & coal,  
the rape of minerals, and all those lovely trees, Aieeeeeh!"  
***That's what our children's children going to blame us for.***  
"Our world is coming apart at the seams  
and I know how I feel about my parent's dreams;  
and they got it totally wrong it seems.  
"Or, that we feel that it's right to go and fight  
and try to face their lack of grace  
in a world that's now devoid of peace

and all the time we seem to find  
we get it just as wrong as them – and there is no more time.”

*So, that's what our children's children are going to blame us for.*

Now, getting back to the theme of better child-rearing practices. In the 1970's, a journalist, Jean Liedloff, had found herself on a trip in the Amazon basin, living with a primitive tribe and realised that – in modern-day society – we have lost an essential level of trust ... in our children ... and we have also lost trust in ourselves! Modern-day parents have forgotten how powerful and influential they are (or can be) to their young children and how easy it is to make them feel as if there is something wrong with them. In her very popular (1975) book, *The Continuum Concept*, Liedloff writes:

*If our parents, our tribesman, our authority figures, clearly expect us to be bad or antisocial or greedy or selfish or dirty or destructive or self-destructive, our social nature is such that we tend to meet the expectations of our elders.*

*Whenever this reversal took place and our elders stopped expecting us to be social and expected us to be anti-social, just to put it in gross terms, that's when the real 'fall' took place. And we're paying for it dearly.*

*The two words that I've arrived at to describe what we all need to feel about ourselves, children and adults, in order to perceive ourselves accurately, are 'worthy' and 'welcome'. If you don't feel worthy and welcome, you really won't know what to do with yourself. You won't know how to behave in a world of other people. You won't think you deserve to get what you need.”<sup>[10]</sup>*

What Liedloff had observed in her several visits to the Yequana tribe in Venezuela, was that their babies were in an almost continuous “60-24-7” physical contact with their mothers, until they were able physically to crawl away. Then, as their horizons extended, children of all ages, babies to teenagers, played all day together, largely unsupervised though in a safe environment, but were also responded to – without judgement – the moment that they needed anything. As a result: “*Not only did the children not fight, they never even argued.*” This is a lovely example, but not perhaps for everyone.

There have also been a number of somewhat idealistic pop songs and poems about the ‘Children of the Future’, usually with more questions than answers; and there have been, as well, some popular and well-known ‘Science Fiction’ stories about “future children”, as well as several films. Some of these are great stories; or they have great ideas; and a few are also dystopian – but all of these – I repeat – “all of these” – are fictitious. **We – as the human species – urgently need to get more real!**

One of the most realistic, wide-spread and successful attempts to break through the hegemony of current day parenthood and repressive social upbringing was the Israeli

---

<sup>10</sup> Liedloff, Jean (1975). *The Continuum Concept: In search of happiness lost*. London: Penguin Arkana.

‘Kibbutz’ movement, as detailed in Bruno Bettelheim’s (1969) book, *The Children of the Dream*. This was a sort-of sociological ‘gut’ reaction to ‘The Holocaust’. Given a chance of freedom, and the possibilities of a new life in the Holy Land, they did not want to repeat some of the same mistakes they may have made in the upbringing of a new generation of children. There were also sound economic and other sociological reasons, as well, for such a social innovation.

Bruno Bettelheim had paralleled Reich’s life and work, in several ways. He was also a pupil of Freud and they both worked together in Freud’s free clinics.

They saw themselves as, “*brokers of social change*”, representing “*human liberation, social empowerment, and freedom from bourgeois convention*”. So, the analysis of what is wrong in our society and thus what might be a concept of a better future, especially for our children, was a fairly prominent theme, then in Europe in the 1920s, when Europe had just emerged from the “double-shock” of the First World War and the 1918-19 influenza pandemic that actually killed more people world-wide than had died as a result of the war <sup>[11]</sup>

There was this other reaction after the Second World War and the defeat of National Socialism. It is not clear (to me) how much Reich actually knew about the Kibbutz movement, or whether he would have approved of it. But what is perhaps relevant to this presentation – and what was unique about the Kibbutz movement – was the re-establishment of the concept of communal or collective child-rearing. Apparently, this started in the Kibbutz on the day of a child’s birth and went on until adulthood. At that time, it was considered a natural outcome of the principle of equality, which was part and parcel of the Kibbutz life. The ‘collective’ of the kibbutz – not the parents – was responsible for the rearing and well-being of all the children born on the kibbutz, taking care of their food, clothing and medical treatment – as everyone received the same share of everything. This is not a new idea – it goes back to earlier times when the “collective” – usually the village – was more central to people’s way of life. This echoes some of Jean Leidloff’s findings.

The founders of the Kibbutz movement aimed at creating the “new man (or new person)” of a (somewhat more) utopian society. Reich might have agreed with some of this, and also with the form of “work democracy” that was practiced in the Kibbutz.

---

<sup>11</sup> The total number of military and civilian casualties in the four years of World War I (1914-1918) were about 40 million: at least, 2 million died from diseases and 6 million went missing, presumed dead. The “Spanish Flu” pandemic (1918-1920) affected 500 million people world-wide – about 1/3 of the world’s population, and the total number of deaths from those 2 years was estimated at least 50 million.



There was also the close connection to Neill's work. Given this, it is understandable that "good education" will form at least one part of the picture of a possible "good society" leading to a future for our children, and their children, etc.

Personally, I am delighted to see and hear about how many primary school children are now doing projects about the environment and about the recent school children's protests about the lack of government action towards climate change (on Fridays, started by the Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg).<sup>[12]</sup> At the 2019 World Economic Forum, she said:

*"I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear that I feel every day. We owe it, to the young people, to give them hope."*

*"This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope? How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"*

So, I believe that these '(post-Reichian) endeavours' demonstrate some key factors towards the issue (and problem) of any possible type of "Children of the Future". The success (or failure) of communal child rearing seems to depend on the size of the group, the child-to-adult ratio, and, above all, the attitude of those **in charge of** the children's development.

So, whatever may have been, and what is also becoming, true in similar "collective" experiments in many countries and – perhaps, by necessity – in the refugee camps in the Middle East, Africa and Asia; in many other devastated areas.

We know that the children of the Kibbutzim were raised in small groups and cared for by skilled and devoted staff: as are children in other social 'experiments' (like the Pestalozzi movement<sup>[13]</sup>; or the world-wide Camphill / Waldorf / Steiner communities<sup>[14]</sup><sup>[15]</sup>). What happens in such experiments can be full of implications for our own wider educational and social developmental methods.

We can see similar beneficial effects in children's social and cultural development in other types of intentional communities: like the Dalai Lama's Tibetan refugee community in

---

<sup>12</sup> **Greta Thunberg**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjsLm5PCdVQ>

<sup>13</sup> Pestalozzi Villages: "Our mission is to produce globally conscious young leaders by supporting their further education in a multi-cultural, multi-faith environment.": <https://www.pestalozzi.org.uk>

<sup>14</sup> Camphill Movement Worldwide: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camphill\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camphill_Movement) – and List of Camphill Communities: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Camphill\\_Communities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Camphill_Communities)

<sup>15</sup> Waldorf/Steiner communities: see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camphill\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camphill_Movement) or [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf\\_education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_education)

Dharamshala, India; or Thich Nhat Hanh's Zen Buddhist "Mindfulness" community in Plum Village, near Bordeaux, France; in various New Age communities – like the Findhorn Foundation (Scotland), Esalen (Big Sur, California), The Farm (in Tennessee), Byron Bay (in Australia), Auroville (in India). Kitezh (in Russia), which provides homes for orphaned children from extremely disadvantaged social conditions; or even in "intentional community programmes", like "boot camps", that help children "normalize" aberrant behaviours and overcome addictions <sup>16</sup>. Children seem to thrive when living in smallish groups of other children with a minimal amount of adult (parental) interference.

However, the results of bringing up children in these communities are often ignored by social researchers as being 'alternative': despite the fact that the real problem is – of course – with the much larger 'mainstream' forms of bringing up children! The relatively isolated nuclear family, with the parents in control, is (possibly) the worst possible model for healthy children. When we examine the maternal bonding, or the 'attachment theory' of psychologists, like John Bowlby, he states:

*What is believed to be essential for mental health is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with (the) mother (or permanent mother substitute – one person who steadily 'mothers' him [i.e. the care-giver]) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment."*

The most intimate contact between mother and infant – after the birth – is that of breast-feeding. In the Kibbutz, other mothers would often breast-feed a child, if the child's mother wasn't available – and you can find the same in other close-knit or intentional communities.

**The health of the community is held to be more important than the predilections of individual parents.**

So, it is possible that we are now beginning to see something of a way forward to a particular vision of the *Children of the Future*, where children are considered 'worthy', 'welcome' and also 'trustworthy': because, they know, and are capable of finding out, what they need – given a benevolent environment.

We can also see something similar being promoted in the very popular children's TV programme that ran in America between about 1968 and 2003: "Mister Rogers",

*Children ... need adults who will protect them from the ever-ready moulders of their world. They need adults who can help them to develop their own healthy controls, who can encourage them to explore their own unique endowments, who*

---

<sup>16</sup> Addiction Helper: <https://www.addictionhelper.com/treatment-rehab/boot-camps-for-kids-and-teens/>

*can know the limits of their own ego strengths and not allow programmers of any sort to infringe on those limits. Children need adults – in every walk of life – who care for children as they care for themselves.*

Being quintessentially positive, Mister Rogers glosses over the “every-ready moulders” of children: however, Reich does not: he is totally unequivocal and he deals with what he calls “*The Emotional Plague*” – at some length – in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book: *Children of the Future* and in some of his other books, like *The Murder of Christ* and *Listen, Little Man!*

### **The Emotional Plague**

Reich saw what he called the “Emotional Plague” as the main cause for getting in the way of children becoming emotionally healthy. He lists several “facts” to support this at some length. He also lists the basic requirements for designated educational and medical workers in this realm, “*Children of the Future*”, which were:

*(1) to follow the principles of work democracy; (2) both utter humility and strong self-confidence; (3) interest in the welfare of future generations, as compared with present-day personal or professional friendships; (4) development of a clear rational hatred of the killer of life, no matter who or what he was; (5) firmness in the pursuit of truth and sharp self-criticism in the execution of this task; (6) restriction of the disease called “socialitis”, i.e. a sacrifice of one’s basic principles to social affiliations; (7) to keep two questions in mind when decisions are to be made: ‘What in the given situation is FOR and what is AGAINST the principle of the living and of natural self-regulation.’ The first has to be encouraged; the second has to be understood and, if possible, fought.*

So, as we get closer to Reich’s actual thoughts about what the *Children of the Future* should be like, he opens the chapter on ‘*Armoring in a Newborn Infant*’ with these words:

*We assume that in a newborn infant, an unwarped, highly plastic bioenergy system, emerges from the womb and from then on it will be influenced by a multitude of environmental impacts, which will begin to form the infant’s specific type of reaction to pleasure and to sorrow. (p. 89)*

This is a very important assumption, and anyone who has parented children with any degree of perspicacity can probably agree with it. But, the detriments of so-called civilisation have persisted for more than 6,000 years – mostly based in patriarchal or patrilineal societies. So, the underlying (pseudo) morality of these still exists – circumcision is still practised; it has taken almost 2,000 years to break the concept of ‘original sin’ and not to see children as having to be moulded by their parents in order to: ... fit into society; ... to be good; ... to get on in life; etc. Yet our distant ancestors knew the importance of this “hands-off” principle; and many so-called ‘primitive’ cultures in existence today (like the Yequana tribe) know this as well. You don’t have to **do** anything **to** the child: you just have to let it be, and grow up, in a healthy, loving environment.

Reich then asks: “What obstacles do we encounter if we decide to *let only the interest of the child, and nothing else, determine the course of events?*” [His italics]

### **Peter Reich**

Coming back to Reich’s views about children, as I said, one major influence was the birth of his son, Peter, in 1944. His observations and concepts, especially regarding the emotional life of children, were focussed on Peter’s early days and years. Reich noted Peter as having an “oral orgasm” at the age of two weeks. Rather surprisingly, almost immediately after this, Peter seemed to become quite disturbed and developed a “falling anxiety” at age 3 weeks, which Reich wrote up in a chapter of this last book. Sharaf wrote (p. 327):

*“The therapeutic steps he took with Peter provided the essential principles upon which his later work with other infants was based.”*

These steps were:

- (1) The child should be picked up and held whenever he cries;
- (2) Any muscular rigidities should be teased out, preferably as part of games with good eye contact and laughter;
- (3) A potential neurosis (like “falling anxiety”) can be ‘teased out’ by playing games that touch on the fear.

Another example of this “teasing out” might be how the game of “peek-a-boo” can be used as a way of overcoming fears of abandonment, or of being shocked or surprised.

Sharaf also lists some of Reich’s concepts, as outlined in his paper about infancy. Firstly, that he used his experience of energetic contact with children to understand better his energetic work with his clients – he was able to relate sympathetically to sudden energetic contractions after an expansion; and these were significantly different from the chronic contractions of a rigid armouring: he called this “anorgonia” – a deficit of ‘orgone’ energy in an organism (p. 328).

Reich had – in effect – developed a new method of child therapy

*“... a kind of “play therapy,” one derived from his long work with the bodily and emotional expression of adults and closely related to the energy functions he was studying in many different realms. Moreover, the kind of therapy he evolved was ideally suited for working with infants. Unlike the usual play therapy, it did not even require that the “patient” act out his fantasies in play and activities. All that Reich did was work directly with the emotional expression and the flow of energy through contact, body “games,” and muscle movement.”* (Ibid, p. 329)

However, this sort of work is still quite remedial, instead of being preventative. So, we need to explore these issues just a little further.

## Different Theories of Child-Rearing

Orson Bean, the actor and founder of the *15<sup>th</sup> Street School*, who had had ‘Orgone Therapy’ with Elsworth Baker, and had written about it in his book, *Me and the Orgone*, was quoted as saying: <sup>[17]</sup>

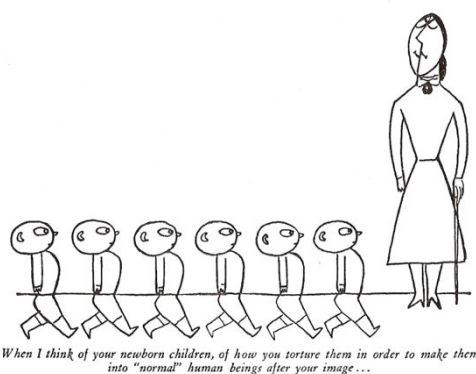
*Until I read Neill's book, 'Summerhill,' I thought there were only two ways to bring up children, either with authoritarian discipline or with permissiveness. Either way, hopefully, applied with love. Now I know there is a third way: teaching a child self-regulation, not by coercion or by abandoning discipline, but by freedom with responsibility."*

There are – now – many other examples of societal and educational ‘experiments’, however individual, isolated or short-lived some of them might be. They are rather like windblown seeds: a few take root and flourish: many don’t. Some of the best-known educational ones include (as mentioned) the Steiner (Waldorf) schools <sup>[18]</sup> and Camphill communities. <sup>[19]</sup> The Montessori kindergartens & schools also have an ethos very similar to much of Reich’s and Neill’s way of thinking. <sup>[20]</sup>

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, with all the different societal changes and attitudes, there have been a considerable number of changes in – family values, cultural trends, social developments and economic conditions, which also included different attitudes to child-rearing. However, there are still many too many examples of what **NOT** to do.

### “Listen, Little Man”

Wilhelm Reich, in his 1948 book, *Listen, Little Man!* (with illustrations by Steig), gives us a right telling off for allowing all these horrors to



<sup>17</sup> The New York Times, 7-Apr, 1964.

<sup>18</sup> The first **Steiner (Waldorf)** school opened in 1919 in Stuttgart, the largest independent school movement in the world, with kindergartens and 646 centres for special education located in the most Waldorf schools, followed by the United States public schools, charter schools and academies, and home-schooling environments.

<sup>19</sup> The **Camphill Movement** is an initiative for social change based on Steiner’s principles of anthroposophy. Camphill communities are residential communities and schools that provide support for the education, employment, and daily lives of adults and children with developmental disabilities, mental health problems, or other special needs. There are over 100 Camphill communities in more than 20 countries across Europe, North America, Southern Africa and Asia.

<sup>20</sup> **Montessori** is a method of education that is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play. In Montessori classrooms, children make creative choices in their learning process, while the highly trained teachers offer age-appropriate activities to guide the children’s process in the classroom. Children work both in small groups and individually with the aim of discovering and exploring knowledge of the world and their environment and to develop their maximum potential.

persist, and he also gives us some telling images of how he sees us – as we are – and what he does not want for the *Children of the Future* that he espoused. However – apparently – we have not listened properly and thus will not have moved on much further in the last 50 years or so.



We tend towards extremes: either too rigid and too authoritative, or too liberal – as illustrated here by Reich & Steig. So, I am now going to enter into the spirit of Reich’s polemic. In answer to the question, “*What would you do, Little Man?*” or – more appropriately perhaps for this conference – “*How can we help the “Children of the Future?”*” or even “*Do our children have a future?*”, we need to understand that ... **We** are the problem. We are the product of 6,000 years of patriarchy, killing and war; our ancestors cut down millions of hectares of forests – and we are still doing the same thing; we have decimated thousands of animal species and driven thousands more into extinction; we have created effective deserts with mono-cultural crops, instead of rich and diverse environments; we have grown up – inevitably – emulating our forebears (and they obviously got it wrong); our cars, buses, trains and planes run on irreplaceable fossil fuels; our houses and our industries warm the planet – almost irrevocably; our basic foods (meat & cereals) are destructive to the planet; and ... most seriously of all, there are currently many, too many – vastly too many – probably 6 billion too many – of us on this little planet – and how are we going to resolve that one?

We – humans – are like a plague, or an infestation, or a virus – spreading ever outwards, but to our own ultimate destruction. So, what is left for our “*Children of the Future*”. Reich is essentially asking us – just to be ourselves; just to be exactly who we properly are – nothing else; no glamour, no politics, no religion, no ‘trying’, no ‘good will’, absolutely nothing – all of which is a necessary first condition.

*“Once you know that you are somebody, that you have a correct opinion of your own. And that your field or factory have to serve life and not death, then you will be able to answer your question for yourself. Your life will be good and secure when aliveness will mean more to you than security; love more than money; your freedom more than party line or public opinion; when the mood of Beethoven or Bach will be the mood of your total existence.”*

**We are the problem** and we have to get out of the way: **we are the current ‘social pathology’** – and we have to prevent this ‘pathology’ being passed down, via our children, to yet another generation.

We actually need to get ourselves out of the way of the “*Children of the Future*”. They need absolutely nothing from us – except love and care in childhood: other than that, we can’t help them. We – like our ancestors – have got it wrong. So, we now have absolutely nothing to give them; for anything that we might give them is potentially contaminated, distorted, neurotic, or part of the ‘emotional plague’ that Reich spoke about – many, many times!

We can try to repair the damage – in fact, we must try to repair the wide-spread damage – that we (and our ancestors) have created: perhaps that is **our** destiny, **our** future. But that is all that we can do. It will probably not be enough, but it might help our children a little bit. This is perhaps our destiny; to repair what we can – but then we can do no more. Nor should we. The future is for our children, and our children’s children and we have to leave it up to them. **The “*Children of the Future*” must be allowed to create their own future.**

I think that this is the essence of Reich’s ideas about child-rearing. And, if he were here today, I can only hope that he would agree – that this ‘particular little man’ got some of it right.

---

*Children of the future age,  
Reading this indignant page,  
Know that in a former time,  
Love, sweet love, was thought a crime.*

William Blake: ‘Songs of Experience’

