

## The Dilemma over "Moral Intuition" and its Relevance to Science

*Dr. G.E. Zuriff, the author of the article discussed below, will be debating at the American Psychiatric Association meeting in Chicago in May, in defense of the idea that reorientation therapy can be ethical.*

An enlightening article appeared in a recent issue of *The Public Interest* (Winter 2000). Entitled "Pedophilia and the Culture Wars," by psychologist G.E. Zuriff, the article describes the handling of the recent A.P.A. pedophilia-study uproar.

Dr. Zuriff asks: is pedophilia harmless, as long as the victims claim they were not psychologically harmed? Or is there a *moral intuition or principle* at work here which is essential to the discussion of harm—and one which psychology ignores?

He sees a curious contradiction in the American Psychological Association's action to stand with the article's congressional critics and *denounce* pedophilia. Previously, the A.P.A. has played the role of social radical. This denunciation of pedophilia radically reverses that role.

On most social issues, "the Left has established an intellectual alliance with the mental-health profession," with the two working together to attack the traditional family by claiming it is "sexist, homophobic, racist, or in some way oppressive to a group favored by the Left, and an alternative (e.g., the homosexual family) is proposed." This alternative is said to be more just and equitable and in no way harmful, and to prove its claim, social scientists undertake research studies of these new types of families.

### The Concept of Disorder Derives from a Moral Concept

But what remains unacknowledged is this reality: that the concept of psychological adjustment is derived from moral notions of what constitute the good life. The Left, he says, "proves its claim" through a framework of utilitarian ethics which are thought to represent the scientific view, while refusing to acknowledge this bias.

There is scant public recognition of the fact that "psychological studies do not fully determine what is good," and thus the A.P.A. is able to justify the *rejection* of a discussion of moral intuition or principle "time after time" in its discussion of such issues as abortion, family forms, and age-of-consent matters.

Interestingly, in its attempts to support favored causes, the A.P.A. sometimes resorts to contradictory reasoning. In a court brief on age-of-consent laws governing abortion, the A.P.A. argued that some 11-year-olds can give informed consent when making the decision to have an abortion. Yet when the pedophilia scandal drew public criticism, the

A.P.A. agreed that a child *cannot* give informed consent to have sex with an adult.

Furthermore, to insist that a pedophile relationship would violate a child because that child cannot freely consent, he says, is to move on into another area—"to appeal to the kind or moral intuition, or principle, that the A.P.A. has rejected time after time."

The psychological profession has already dismantled the traditional family by debunking the building blocks of "heterosexuality, the necessity for two parents, marriage, gendered division of labor, hierarchy of power, and biological relatedness."

The pedophilia article offered an argument for dismantling one *remaining* requirement—that the adult caregiver abstain from sex with the child he cares for. But "the A.P.A. peered into this abyss and backed off," Dr. Zuriff notes. "Why?"

### Is the "Utilitarian Calculus" Sufficient To Understand Disorder?

"At issue here," he explains, "is whether there are moral standards beyond the utilitarian calculation of observable physical or psychological harm." But this is a contentious subject because "whereas moral intuition is the foundation of society for the traditionalists, it is mere patriarchal oppression for the Left." And the A.P.A. has been extremely reluctant to concede that moral principle should play an important role in public policy.

In an article in the April 1997 issue of *The World and I* ("Psychology's Dis-Orientation"), Dr. Zuriff earlier argued that the question, "Does homosexuality constitute a psychopathology?" is a *social-cultural* rather than a scientific one. Science can reveal the consequences of behavior, but it cannot tell us whether the consequences are harmful or beneficial; that determination must inevitably be made in the form of a social-moral value judgment.

Numerous other clinicians and researchers have made a similar observation. The mental-health profession tends to misrepresent social science as a "neutral" undertaking, they say, when in fact psychology is inevitably a moral enterprise. Those researchers include Gary Greenberg, in his "Right Answers, Wrong Reasons: Revisiting the Deletion of Homosexuality from the DSM," *Review of General Psychology*, 1997 vol 1, no. 3, pp. 256-270 (to be discussed in a future *Bulletin*), and Stuart Kirk and Herb Kutchins in their 1992 book, *The Selling of DSM: The Rhetoric of Science in Psychiatry*. ■