

# \*A Note on Authority Intervention and Enforcement

HERSCHEL PRINS

MOST DISCUSSIONS about "authority" tend to be all-embracing, with the result that lines get crossed and semantic arguments develop. In this short note I want to say something about "authority", "intervention" and "enforcement".

## AUTHORITY

I have discussed some of the definitions of authority elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Suffice it to say that authority implies a power relationship, an influence derived from office, rank, character, age or experience. French and Raven (1959)<sup>2</sup>, suggest that there are five types of power—as under:

- (a) Reward power.
- (b) Coercive power.
- (c) Legitimate power.
- (d) Referent power.
- (e) Expert power.

From our point of view their last classification is probably the most relevant since this is the element of authority seen by clients *in addition*

to that of the agency itself. It is necessary to remind ourselves of this from time to time, since this kind of authority exists in all agencies, and is *not*, as is sometimes supposed, peculiar to, for e.g., the probation setting. In the exercise of authority, Jacques (1952)<sup>3</sup> has three important points to make. He suggests that the person exercising authority must:

- (a) be clear about what is required of him; something which we often too readily assume, and certainly students need a good deal of help in this area;
- (b) be competent to undertake the task; and
- (c) have resolved the ambivalence involved in the exercise of authority.

Points (b) and (c) have important implications in relation to selection and training.

## INTERVENTION

Does intervention cut across the client's right to self-direction? It does in certain circumstances but,

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for reasons which I shall be giving shortly, it seems right that it should. For the moment we should remind ourselves that there are three important areas of *casework* practice where intervention looms large, namely: probation; child care (in cases involving the compulsory removal of children) and; mental health (where caseworkers often have to inflict themselves on unwilling clients).

We should remember that the right to intervene is dictated by society (through the agency) and not by the whim of the caseworker. As Irvine (1964)<sup>4</sup> suggests, in a democratic society there is a need to protect individuals from each other and to limit the rights of all for the mutual protection of each. Some people have advocated that the individual should always be allowed a free choice (if he is of sound mind), but this ignores the distress which may be caused to relatives and others. This problem, especially as it relates to the needs of the elderly, has been recently discussed by Travis and Neely (1967)<sup>5</sup>. Often the arguments get most heated in relation to the "rights" of parents over their children. The "non-interveners" seem to assume that all parents are equally mature, intelligent and responsible, and that whatever their characteristics their children are their property. However, as Irvine suggests, society does not take this view since, for example, it provides a school medical inspection service, employs health visitors, provides school attendance officers and, in certain cases, authorises the

N.S.P.C.C. to intervene. We could go on and quote other examples where intervention is held to be right. If we become too "high-minded" about the need for intervention we may, as has been suggested, involve ourselves in the inhumanity of withholding help which was needed but not asked for, and then punishing people for failing in tasks which they lack the ability to cope with unaided.

#### ENFORCEMENT

Hunt (1964)<sup>6</sup> has indicated the value of enforced relationships for some delinquents. Enforced relationships have at least three distinct advantages:

(a) The power to "hold" a client in a relationship from which he cannot too easily withdraw if the situation becomes uncomfortable and this, in itself, may provide opportunities for growth and change.

(b) The acceptance of a caseworker in an enforced relationship may enable the client to begin to accept other figures in authority more readily (e.g. parents, teachers, employers).

(c) May enable the client to accept the fact that he has been classified as an offender.

There are also a number of delinquents who, by their behaviour, are seeking a measure of control. Winnicott (1958)<sup>7</sup> goes so far as to suggest that the act of delinquency itself may "compel the environment to be important". Clare Winnicott (1962)<sup>8</sup> suggests that some delinquents look for a benign but firm

person in authority, because this is what they have been deprived of in their earlier relationships, and certainly probation officers and staffs of penal establishments could attest to this. For the probation officer, Winnicott (1962 op. cit.) sums it up very nicely when she says: "the probation officer, for example, can humanise the machinery of the law, but he cannot side-step it, without missing the whole point of the symptom and needs of the client. If he does miss the point, the client either gives up hope, or commits another offence. . . ." John St. John (1961)<sup>9</sup>, gives an interesting example of control not being exercised when he quotes the probationer who complained that his probation officer was not strict enough: "if he'd given me a good telling off it might have been different. I'd have pulled myself together like. . . . Even, when I'd been up for a breach, he still gave me the old syrup . . . after that probation seemed a farce". Caseworkers have not always applied themselves well to the group of clients who need control. This may be, as Pollak (1961)<sup>10</sup> has suggested because the principles of casework appropriate for the treatment of the *neurotic* (my italics), have become well entrenched in the casework profession, and that principles which were applicable in the 1930s when liberating techniques were useful are less relevant today, when there is too much feeling flowing into action, too little sense of guilt, too few inhibitions. The expression of the need for control may come

across in sometimes subtle, sometimes more obvious ways. Two short case extracts illustrate this:

*Case I.* "D" aged 20. On probation for causing grievous bodily harm with intent. (Attacking another youth with a piece of lead pipe.) Father had died many years earlier, mother, though still alive, was over anxious and ineffectual. There was a more successful younger brother. D had been exposed to long periods of hospitalisation for various illnesses, had few friends and had always been timid and uncertain of himself. During his interviews with his probation officer he talked of having met up with another boy who had told him that he would give him a good hiding himself if ever he got into the same trouble again. He also talked on another occasion about his anxiety if he should meet the youth he attacked again. In further interviews he referred to the ineffectiveness of probation in that the probation officer did not know where he went when he left his office and, on one occasion, when under serious stress, suggested that he might get involved in even more serious offences, like murder.

*Case II.* "J" aged 22. On probation for housebreaking. Previous offences included assault and stealing. Poor relationship with father for many years to the point of open feuding. Father

currently a very sick and ineffective man. During the course of probation supervision, J continually referred to his need for discipline and how he had got the better of most authority figures in his life. Expressed a great desire to be less impulsive. At various times when he felt the probation officer was not taking these things up, he would act provocatively and aggressively to get the officer to be more controlling. As probation continued it was possible to get J to see some of these

things for himself and to attempt to modify his conduct.

#### SUMMARY

I have looked very briefly at three aspects of authority—authority, intervention, and enforcement. All are very closely linked but have some different features. I considered enforcement at more length, because in casework with delinquents there will always be a number of clients who need consistent, firm, yet benign control to enable them to build up standards of more appropriate behaviour for themselves.

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