

LLOYD DEMAUSE (1931-2020):
THE FATHER OF PSYCHOHISTORY

by

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Throughout the course of my career, I have had the privilege of meeting many extremely intelligent teachers, colleagues, and students, most of whom have impressed me with their wisdom and erudition and liveliness of mind. But I have encountered only a small handful of people whom I would describe as veritable *geniuses*, and Lloyd deMause undoubtedly occupies a premier position on that list.

Sadly, many scholars and psychoanalytical clinicians will not recognise the name of Lloyd deMause, as he worked independently and published his own books and journals, but few have, in my estimation, made a greater contribution to the study of trauma and child abuse, and few have enhanced the fields of psychohistory and the history of childhood, as well as the study of psychobiography, and, also, the understanding of political psychology as richly as this remarkable thinker, researcher, and theoretician has done.

Born on 19th September, 1931, in Detroit, Michigan, deMause studied political science at Columbia University in New York City, New York, and then became a research assistant to the noted sociologist Professor C. Wright Mills, before having become a candidate at the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training. Although psychoanalysed by the leading New York clinician Dr. Reuben Fine, who founded the Division of Psychoanalysis of the American Psychological Association and who wrote an impressive textbook, *A History of Psychoanalysis* (Fine, 1979), Lloyd deMause elected to focus his own multiple energies upon scholarship rather than upon clinical practice with patients. In fact, deMause became, in many respects, the epitome of the applied psychoanalyst, and he used his deep knowledge of Freudianism to illuminate history and culture and politics with great profundity.

During the 1950s and 1960s, very few historians had dared to examine the treatment of children throughout the ages in a serious or detailed manner. Indeed, if one peruses the biographies of historical personalities written in the first half of the twentieth century, one

will often be shocked that the chapters devoted to the subjects' early years frequently occupy no more than a few pages. As Lloyd deMause often noted, back then, long before the emergence of the modern feminist movement, scholars devoted all of their attention to the study of kings and castles; very few examined the history of women, of peasants, and of ethnic minorities, and, certainly, almost no one explored the ways in which adults related to their infants and children.

Aware of this gaping hole in scholarship, deMause collaborated with a small and somewhat marginal group of forward-thinking fellow academics to investigate the history of child care in detail from ancient times to the present day; and, in 1974, he published the remarkable edited book, *The History of Childhood* (deMause, 1974a), which featured his own landmark chapter on "The Evolution of Childhood" (deMause, 1974b), fully seventy-three pages in length and brimming with detailed notes and references to a remarkable range of sources across many centuries. In this compelling and impactful study, deMause discovered that, during antiquity, a significant percentage of parents would sacrifice their children to the gods – an act that we would now describe purely and simply as infanticide. In subsequent centuries, mothers and fathers would abandon their offspring, beat them mercilessly, and engage in other forms of cruelty. Shockingly, deMause argued that only in the twentieth century did parents begin to treat their children in a more consistently loving manner.

Contemporaneously, deMause launched his very own journal, the *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, which commenced publication in 1973 and which then became restyled, more broadly, as *The Journal of Psychohistory* in 1976. Happily, this landmark periodical continues to publish creative essays on applied psychoanalysis to this very day.

If one examines the chapters in deMause's edited book on *The History of Childhood* and the early papers published in his journal, one readily appreciates the huge contribution

that he and his colleagues made to our understanding of the ubiquity of child abuse throughout the ages. These early works proved particularly striking, especially in view of the fact that few mental health professionals in the 1960s and 1970s recognised the widespread nature of parental abuse and cruelty at all.

But deMause did not confine himself to the study of child maltreatment throughout the ages; in fact, he used this historical data as the bedrock for an understanding of broader events and movements throughout the course of humanity. DeMause argued that one simply cannot understand political cruelty and warfare without first appreciating the significance of childhood traumata endured by world leaders and their followers. According to deMause, the history of childhood formed the very bedrock of political psychobiography and, subsequently, of the study of group processes throughout the ages, focusing on the ways in which early experiences of cruelty become repressed in the unconscious and then re-enacted upon the public stage in the shape of global violence.

In an effort to collaborate with open-minded colleagues, Lloyd deMause founded the Institute of Psychohistory in New York City, New York, and hosted regular meetings in his office building on Broadway, discussing his ideas with a pioneering group of scholars and clinicians from a wide range of disciplines. In many respects, the gatherings at the Institute of Psychohistory resembled the early meetings of Professor Sigmund Freud's Wednesday night study group, which became the foundation of the Wiener Psychoanalytische Vereinigung [Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society] – the world's very first formal psychoanalytical establishment. And, not unlike Freud, who also launched the Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Vereinigung [International Psycho-Analytical Association], deMause created an I.P.A. of his own, namely, the International Psychohistorical Association – a small, but persistent, global organisation which still flourishes, and which hosts an impressive, interdisciplinary annual conference.

DeMause persevered with his unique research and scholarship. In 1975, he produced another compelling edited book, *The New Psychohistory* (deMause, 1975a), as well as a very erudite reference work, *A Bibliography of Psychohistory* (deMause, 1975b). And not long thereafter, he co-edited a book about the American President, Jimmy Carter, entitled, *Jimmy Carter and American Fantasy: Psychohistorical Explorations* (deMause and Ebel, 1977), which investigated the ways in which Carter's early childhood experiences contributed to his work in the White House. Building upon these early tomes, deMause then proceeded to produce a magnificent volume of collected papers, *Foundations of Psychohistory* (deMause, 1982), followed not long thereafter by a psychobiographical and political psychological study of Ronald Reagan, published under the title *Reagan's America* (deMause, 1984). Ultimately, he completed a stellar tome, *The Emotional Life of Nations* (deMause, 2002) – a truly profound and memorable integration of his life's work. Each of these pioneering texts deserves a Festschrift of its own, and I deeply hope that psychoanalytical scholars who have not yet enjoyed the privilege of reading deMause will begin to examine these unique, original, and staggeringly insightful psychoanalytical texts which remind one of the boldness and breadth of the early writings of Freud himself.

As an undergraduate, I happened to stumble upon the work of Lloyd deMause, simply by browsing the shelves of my university library. I began to read his writings, and, in due course, I had the privilege of meeting him in person. Within minutes, I became a huge fan. His work on the widespread practice of infanticide in the ancient world impacted greatly upon my clinical training; and when, as a young man, I began to treat chronic schizophrenic patients, I found myself listening to story after story of parents threatening to murder their children. None of my clinical supervisors seemed at all interested in knowing about what I came to classify as “*psychological infanticide*” (Kahr, 1993, p. 269) and, ultimately, as the “*Infanticidal Attachment*” (Kahr, 2007, p. 119), but, happily, deMause encouraged me to

apply his psychohistorical research on infanticide to my own preliminary efforts in a psychiatric hospital; and it pleases me that I have persevered with these clinical investigations, which have continued to enlighten my understanding in the consulting room to this very day.

In 1992, I invited Lloyd deMause to London to deliver several lectures. Within a short number of days, he spoke to The Parent Infant Clinic, the Portman Clinic, the British Psycho-Analytical Society, and the Association of Child Psychotherapists. In view of deMause's established track record of compelling publications, each of these organisations embraced the opportunity to host him as a speaker.

The colleagues at The Parent Infant Clinic, a small and forward-thinking institution founded by the child psychotherapist Dr. Stella Acquarone, greeted deMause warmly and engaged with the horrors of his material on the nature of child abuse throughout the ages. On this occasion, he received a very warm and serious response.

Not long thereafter, deMause addressed the staff members at the Portman Clinic in London – a specialist psychoanalytical centre for the treatment of forensic patients. The audience responded with tremendous sympathy. One psychiatrist exclaimed that, when she had first trained years previously, she knew nothing about child abuse and that, with the benefit of hindsight, she came to appreciate that she had overlooked the warning signs of sexual traumatisation in her patients. Certainly, she conveyed deep respect for deMause's pioneering work in this field.

The members of the British Psycho-Analytical Society hosted an early supper for Lloyd deMause and then, afterwards, listened carefully to his lucid presentation; but, alas, in contrast to colleagues at The Parent Infant Clinic and the Portman Clinic, the bulk of the classical psychoanalytical practitioners in the room squirmed rather uncomfortably as he spoke frankly about abuse and trauma. I shall never forget that one of the attendees – a noted

psychiatrist and psychoanalyst – asked deMause whether child sexual abuse at boarding school should really be considered a matter of serious concern. DeMause looked horrified at being asked such a question and replied that, in his experience, all child sexual abuse results in dreadful clinical consequences. The psychoanalyst replied that if abuse at boarding school occurred on quite a regular basis, and if *all* of the boys had to endure such an experience from teachers, then, surely, abuse ought to be normalised, rather than pathologised!

When deMause delivered a further paper to a gathering of the Association of Child Psychotherapists at the Tavistock Clinic, its members responded neither with appreciation (as the guests at The Parent Infant Clinic and the Portman Clinic had done), nor with denial (as one of the members of the British Psycho-Analytical Society had done), but, rather, with vitriol and outrage. One especially noted child psychotherapist screamed at deMause and berated him for having dared to present a paper filled with such ugly material. She exclaimed angrily, “I feel like you’re beating us on the head.”

The sheer range of reactions to deMause’s presentations shocked me greatly. How could a senior psychiatrically trained psychoanalyst suppose that being sodomised at boarding school might be of little consequence? One could not help but wonder whether this man had, in fact, endured such an experience during his own youth. And how could one of the United Kingdom’s most distinguished child psychotherapists feel beaten up, simply because a visiting scholar had shared his research on the history of child abuse? One would have thought that a child mental health professional would already have developed a sufficiently protective state of mind to tolerate hearing about such cases.

In discussing this situation with my esteemed colleague, Dr. Valerie Sinason, I came to appreciate more fully that, back in the 1970s and 1980s, and even into the early 1990s, most British mental health workers simply did not study child abuse as part of their clinical trainings. Indeed, when Sinason practised as a child psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic

in the 1970s, many of her colleagues refused to believe her when she reported stories of child sexual abuse, which her patients revealed. Quite a number presumed that the child patients in question must have suffered from erotic delusions of some sort or from oedipal fantasies.

It saddened me greatly that deMause had to tolerate such resistance from senior mental health professionals, especially after he had flown several thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean.

Happily, I managed to invite deMause back to London approximately fourteen years later, in 2006, having arranged for him to deliver The Fifth Annual Donald Winnicott Memorial Lecture, sponsored by The Winnicott Clinic of Psychotherapy. By this point in time, mental health practitioners had become infinitely more skilled at processing and handling abuse cases; and thus, on this occasion, when deMause spoke about the status of child abuse in the United Kingdom, no one offered a single defensive or snarky comment. In fact, he received a deeply appreciative reception from a very sophisticated and responsive audience.

Throughout his career, Lloyd deMause had to endure an enormous amount of suspicion, especially during the early days, as he became the unwelcome messenger who alerted us to the awful realities of abuse and its grotesque consequences, both clinically and globally. In this respect, he offended many people simply because he told the truth. Although deMause never practised psychotherapeutically *per se*, his work as an educator, about the realities of child abuse, will, I suspect, have informed generations of younger clinicians, myself included, many of whom will have endeavoured to do our best to help survivors of childhood cruelty to lead more peaceful, protected lives.

I deeply regret that, in this context, I cannot provide a fuller and more detailed analysis of deMause's many contributions to childhood history, to the study of political psychology, and to so many other fields of applied psychoanalytical scholarship. But I hope

that this short tribute will, at the very least, remind colleagues of the huge contributions of this remarkable genius and kindly man, and might, perhaps, offer a gentle nudge to us all to seek out deMause's many inspiring books and papers. I know that I have learned as much about the practice of psychology from Lloyd deMause as I have done from reading the works of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Donald Winnicott. I cannot think of a better way to acknowledge a man of such vision and generosity.

After a long and creative life, Lloyd deMause passed away on 23rd April, 2020, in New York City, at the age of eighty-eight years, having struggled with the challenges of Alzheimer's Disease. His loving and long-standing wife, the psychoanalyst Susan Hein, cared for him with deepest affection, as did his three children, Neil, Jennifer, and Jonathan. Lloyd deMause will be much missed by those who had the privilege to know him. Thankfully, his blue-sky thinking and his landmark work will always endure.

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