**Excerpt from Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers***

*Heinlein’s novel takes place in the future when soldiers are well trained to fight in super-powered suits against formidable aliens called “Bugs.” The alien invaders are just as strong as humans, but act like insects and do not communicate with humans; they only try to kill them. The world has been training soldiers to survive annihilation from the Bugs, but also to be a better society, where people work together and have a strong sense of duty. At this point, the protagonist Juan Rico is remembering what he learned in high school.*

*To what countries is Mr. Dubois referring?*

*What does “law-abiding” mean?*

*Why were law-abiding people frightened of parks?*

*Why is Juan Rico confused?*

***From Chapter VIII, pp. 90-96:***

I found myself mulling over a discussion in our class in History and Moral Philosophy. Mr. Dubois was talking about the disorders that preceded the breakup of the North American republic, back in the 20th century. According to him, there was a time just before they went down the drain when such crimes as murder were as common as dogfights. The Terror had not been just in North America -- Russia and the British Isles had it, too, as well as other places. But it reached its peak in North America shortly before things went to pieces.

"Law-abiding people," Dubois had told us, "hardly dared go into a public park at night. To do so was to risk attack by wolf packs of children, armed with chains, knives, home-made guns, bludgeons ... to be hurt at least, robbed most certainly, injured for life probably -- or even killed. This went on for years, right up to the war between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony. Murder, drug addiction, larceny, assault, and vandalism were commonplace. Nor were parks the only places -- these things happened also on the streets in daylight, on school grounds, even inside school buildings. But parks were so notoriously unsafe that honest people stayed clear of them after dark."

I had tried to imagine such things happening in our schools, I simply couldn't. Nor in our parks. A park was a place for fun, not for getting hurt. As for getting killed in one -- "Mr. Dubois, didn't they have police? Or courts?"

"They had many more police than we have. And more courts. All overworked."

"I guess I don't get it." If a boy in our city had done anything half that bad ... well, he and his father would have been flogged side by side. But such things just didn't happen.

Mr. Dubois then demanded of me, "Define a 'juvenile delinquent.'"

"Uh, one of those kids -- the ones who used to beat up people."

*What is a” juvenile delinquent?”*

*What does “house break” mean?*

*What does Juan Rico say is the best way to “house break” a puppy?*

*What is a “sadist?”*

"Wrong."

"Huh? But the book said -- "

"My apologies. Your textbook does so state. But calling a tail a leg does not make the name fit. 'Juvenile delinquent' is a contradiction in terms, one which gives a clue to their problem and their failure to solve it. Have you ever raised a puppy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you housebreak him?"

"Err ... yes, sir. Eventually." It was my slowness in this that caused my mother to rule that dogs must stay out of the house.

"Ah, yes. When your puppy made mistakes, were you angry?"

"What? Why, he didn't know any better; he was just a puppy."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I scolded him and rubbed his nose in it and paddled him."

"Surely he could not understand your words?"

"No, but he could tell I was sore at him!"

"But you just said that you were not angry."

Mr. Dubois had an infuriating way of getting a person mixed up, "No, but I had to make him *think* I was. He had to learn, didn't he?"

"Conceded. But, having made it clear to him that you disapproved, how could you be so cruel as to spank him as well? You said the poor beastie didn't know that he was doing wrong. Yet you inflicted pain. Justify yourself! Or are you a sadist?"

I didn't then know what a sadist was -- but I know pups. "Mr. Dubois, you *have* to! You scold him so that he knows he's in trouble, you rub his nose in it so that he will know what trouble you mean, you paddle him so that he darn well won't do it again -- and you have to do it right away! It doesn't do a bit of good to punish him later; you'll just confuse him. Even so, he won't learn from one lesson, so you watch and catch him again and paddle him still harder. Pretty soon he learns. But it's a waste of breath just to scold him." Then I added, "I guess you've never raised pups."

"Many. I'm raising a daschund now -- by your methods. Let's get back to those juvenile criminals. The most vicious averaged somewhat younger than you here in this class ...and they often started their lawless careers much younger. Let us never forget that puppy. These children were often caught; police arrested batches each day. Were they scolded? Yes, often scathingly. Were their noses rubbed in it? Rarely. Newspapers and officials usually kept their names secret -- in many places this was the law for criminals under eighteen. Were they spanked? Indeed not! Many had never been spanked even as small children; there was a widespread belief that spanking, or any punishment involving pain, did a child permanent psychic damage."

*What is a “dachshund?”*

*Mr. Dubois is only talking about puppies in order to teach about punishing underage criminals. What is he saying society should do?*

*Mr. Dubois is a veteran soldier. What clue can you find that reveals this?*

*On this page, what does “switch” mean?*

(I had reflected that my father must never have heard of that theory.)

"Corporal punishment in schools was forbidden by law," he had gone on. "Flogging was lawful as sentence of court only in one small province, Delaware, and there only for a few crimes and was rarely invoked; it was regarded as 'cruel and unusual punishment.'" Dubois had mused aloud, "I do not understand objections to 'cruel and unusual' punishment. While a judge should be benevolent in purpose, his awards should cause the criminal to suffer, else there is no punishment -- and pain is the basic mechanism built into us by millions of years of evolution which safeguards us by warning when something threatens our survival. Why should society refuse to use such a highly perfected survival mechanism? However, that period was loaded with pre-scientific pseudo-psychological nonsense.

"As for 'unusual,' punishment *must* be unusual or it serves no purpose." He then pointed his stump at another boy. "What would happen if a puppy were spanked every hour?"

"Uh ... probably drive him crazy!"

"Probably. It certainly will not teach him anything. How long has it been since the principal of this school last had to switch a pupil?"

"Uh, I'm not sure. About two years. The kid that swiped --"

"Never mind. Long enough. It means that such punishment is so unusual as to be significant, to deter, to instruct. Back to these young criminals -- They probably were not spanked as babies; they certainly were not flogged for their crimes. The usual sentence was: for a first offence, a warning -- a scolding, often without trial. After several offenses a sentence of confinement but with sentence suspended and the youngster placed on probation. A boy might be arrested may times and convicted several times before he was punished -- and then it would be merely confinement, with others like him from whom he learned still more criminal habits. If he kept out of major trouble while confined, he could usually evade most of even that mild punishment, be given probation -- 'paroled' in the jargon of the times.

"This incredible sequence could go on for years while his crimes increased in frequency and viciousness, with no punishment whatever save rare dull-but-comfortable confinements. Then suddenly, usually by law on his eighteenth birthday, this so-called 'juvenile delinquent' becomes an adult criminal -- and sometimes wound up in only weeks or months in a death cell awaiting execution for murder."

He had singled me out again. "Suppose you merely scolded your puppy, never punished him, let him go on making messes in the house ... and occasionally locked him up in an outbuilding but soon let him back into the house with a warning not to do it again. Then one day you notice that he is now a grown dog and *still* not housebroken -- whereupon you whip out a gun and shoot him dead. Comment, please?"

"Why ... that's the craziest way to raise a dog I ever heard of!"

"I agree. Or a child. Whose fault would it be?"

"Uh ... why, mine, I guess."

"Again I agree. But I'm not guessing."

"Mr. Dubois," a girl blurted out, "but *why?* Why didn't they spank little kids when they needed it and use a good dose of the strap on any older ones who deserved it -- the sort of lesson they wouldn't forget! I mean ones who did things really *bad*. Why not?"

"I don't know," he had answered grimly, "except that the time-tested method of instilling social virtue and respect for law in the minds of the young did not appeal to a pre-scientific pseudo-professional class who called themselves 'social workers' or sometimes 'child psychologists.' It was too simple for them, apparently, since anybody could do it, using only the patience and firmness needed in training a puppy. I have sometimes wondered if they cherished a vested interest in disorder -- but that is unlikely; adults almost always act from conscious 'highest motives' no matter what their behavior."

"But -- good heavens!" the girl answered. "I didn't like being spanked any more than any kid does, but when I needed it, my mama delivered. The only time I ever got a switching in school I got another one when I got home -- and that was years and years ago. I don't ever expect to be hauled up in front of a judge and sentenced to a flogging; you behave yourself and such things don't happen. I don't see anything wrong with our system; it's a lot better than not being able to walk outdoors for fear of your life -- why that's *horrible!*"

"I agree. Young lady, the tragic wrongness of what those well-meaning people did, contrasted with what they *thought* they were doing, goes very deep. They had no scientific theory of morals. They did have a theory of morals and they tried to live by it (I should not have sneered at their motives), but their theory was *wrong* -- half of it fuzzy-headed wishful thinking, half of it rationalized charlatanry. The more earnest they were, the farther it led them astray. You see, they assumed that Man had a moral instinct."

*What is “corporal punishment?” And what does Robert Heinlein want his 1959 readers to believe about it?*

*What is “moral instinct?”*

*Why does Heinlein believe humans don’t have it?*

*Does Robert Heinlein have a good point about human rights? What is it?*

"Sir? I thought -- But he does! *I* have."

"No, my dear, you have a cultivated conscience, a most carefully trained one. Man has *no moral instinct.* He is not born with moral sense. You were not born with it, I was not -- and a puppy has none. We *acquire* moral sense, when we do, through training, experience, and hard sweat of the mind. These unfortunate juvenile criminals were born with none, even as you and I, and they had no chance to acquire any; their experiences did not permit it. What *is* 'moral sense'? It is an elaboration of the instinct to survive. The instinct to survive is human nature itself, and every aspect of our personalities derives from it. Anything that conflicts with the survival instinct acts sooner or later to eliminate the individual and thereby fails to show up in future generations. This truth is mathematically demonstrable, everywhere verifiable; it is the single eternal imperative controlling everything we do.

"But the instinct to survive," he had gone on, "can be cultivated into motivations more subtle and much more complex than the blind, brute urge of the individual to stay alive. Young lady, what you miscalled your 'moral instinct' was the instilling in you by your elders of the truth that survival can have stronger imperatives than that of your own personal survival. Survival of your family, for example. Of your children, when you have them. Of your nation, if you struggle that high up the scale. And so on up. A scientifically verifiable theory of morals must be rooted in the individual's instinct to survive -- *and nowhere else!* -- and must correctly describe the hierarchy of survival, note the motivations at each level, and resolve all conflicts.

"We have such a theory now; we can solve any moral problem, on any level. Self-interest, love of family, duty to country, responsibility toward the human race -- we are even developing an exact ethic for extra-human relations. But all moral problems can be illustrated by one misquotation: 'Greater love hath no man than a mother cat dying to defend her kittens.' Once you understand the problem facing that cat and how she solved it, you will then be ready to examine yourself and learn how high up the moral ladder you are capable of climbing.

"These juvenile criminals hit a low level. Born with only the instinct for survival, the highest morality they achieved was a shaky loyalty to a peer group, a street gang. But the do-gooders attempted to 'appeal to their better natures,' to 'reach them,' to 'spark their moral sense.' *Tosh!* They *had* no 'better natures'; experience taught them that what they were doing was the way to survive. The puppy never got his spanking; therefore what he did with pleasure and success must be 'moral.'

"The basis of all morality is duty, a concept with the same relation to group that self-interest has to individual. Nobody preached duty to these kids in a way they could understand -- that is, with a spanking. But the society they were in told them endlessly about their 'rights.'

"The results should have been predictable, since a human being has *no natural rights of any nature."*

Mr. Dubois had paused. Somebody took the bait. "Sir? How about 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?’"

"Ah, yes, the 'unalienable rights.' Each year someone quotes that magnificent poetry. Life? What 'right' to life has a man who is drowning in the Pacific? The ocean will not hearken his cries. What 'right' to life has a man who must die if he is to save his children? If the chooses to save his own life, does he do so as a matter of 'right'? If two men are starving and cannibalism is the only alternative to death, which man's right is 'unalienable'? And is it 'right'? As to liberty, the heroes who signed the great document pledged themselves to *buy* liberty with their lives. Liberty is *never* unalienable; it must be redeemed regularly with the blood of patriots or it *always* vanishes. Of all the so-called natural human rights that have ever been invented, liberty is the least likely to be cheap and is *never* free of cost.

"The third 'right' -- the 'pursuit of happiness'? It is indeed unalienable but it is not a right; it is ismply a universal condition which tyrants cannot take away nor patriots restore. Cast me into a dungeon, burn me at the stake, crown me king of kings, I can 'pursue happiness' as long as my brain lives -- but neither gods nor saints, wise men nor subtle drugs, can insure that I will catch it."

Mr. Dubois then turned to me. "I told you that 'juvenile delinquent' is a contradiction in terms. 'Delinquent' means 'failing in duty.' But *duty* is an *adult* virtue -- indeed a juvenile becomes an adult when, and only when, he acquires a knowledge of duty and embraces it as dearer than the self-love he was born with. There never was, there cannot *be*, a 'juvenile delinquent.' But for every juvenile criminal there are always one or more adult delinquents -- people of mature years who either do not know their duty, or who, knowing it, fail.

"And *that* was the soft spot which destroyed what was in many ways an admirable culture. The junior hoodlums who roamed their streets were symptoms of a greater sickness; their citizens (all of them counted as such) glorified their mythology of 'rights' ... and lost track of their duties. No nation, so constituted, can endure."