

Youth and the Onward Search

Thomas Wolfe regretted that his life moved "between the poles of anchored loneliness and footloose voyagings." His regret becomes our challenge in a world of awesome mobility toward unknown poles. Are we not in constant danger of seeking security in the anchors of conformity only to find loneliness in the very midst of the crowd?

Perhaps out there on the voice of the wind more than any other cry is that of William Blake:

Father, O father! what do we here,
In this land of unbelief and fear?

What do we do here? For one thing, we seek human fulfillment through the pursuit of values, recognizing that as some of these compete and conflict we find it necessary to design patterns of compromise and mutual adjustment. As Julian Huxley has explained, while the contribution made by values in biological evolution cannot be proved, there can be no denial of the importance of values in human affairs. "In lower organisms, the only ultimate criterion is survival: but in man some experiences and

actions, some objects and ideas, are valued for their own sake."¹

To say that man has always valued some things above others is like saying that man has always breathed without telling why. He breathes to live and he values to make that life more meaningful. Should we not say then, "Father, O father! We value here"? And because we value cannot we create out of this energy the forces necessary to ameliorate unbelief and fear, leaving proof for tomorrow that we gave meaning to today?

Before this measure of our lives can be approached, however, we must find the yardstick to measure our actions, the scale to weigh the right and the wrong. Without such measurement how can we exemplify our values, take them out of the realm of words into the world of deeds? Without exemplification, good intentions dissolve into ambivalence and finally die in the ashes of confusion. We become aware of values as we see them expressed by others, often accepting them without any consciousness of their importance.

As we take over our own responsibility

¹ Julian Huxley. *Knowledge, Morality and Destiny*. New York: A Mentor Book, 1960. p. 94.

for value selection we frequently accept the commonly held values of peer group and other agents of socialization, such as the mass media, without evaluating their appropriateness to our own purposes. We need to grow to the point where we take our learned values and create upon them, take the values we see about us and construct with them to the ultimate pinnacle where we find belief built upon critical analysis of alternatives.

Clarity ought to be our commitment, clarity of conviction and of action, clarity born of principle and unafraid to set before itself the standards of its integrity: a clarity unafraid to declare itself the child of the institutions that nurtured its development and encouraged the giving of its credo to others. Who are we to deny or to fear the right of the school to forge the values of our society and at the same time to expect of the school the beacon of leadership during a time in history when lights dim all too easily?

Goethe, commenting upon the times in which he lived, asked, "What kind of a time is this when one must envy the dead and buried?" Is this not what too many are asking today? Too many cast off the problems and shirk the responsibility of shaping and molding change because they have become imprisoned within change. Instead of believing that these are the worst of times, should we not be moving to make these the best of times?

Dimensions of Valuing

Yet we cannot begin to take any positive action toward creative outcomes until we establish for ourselves the dimensions in which we must operate. Such dimensions give shape and perspective to those things we hold to be worthy and to those we reject. Those "things" are, in fact, the interrelated ideas, concepts and

practices we call our system of values. Nor can this system be born or live in a vacuum: it gains its vitality as it functions for man. It is modified as man is continually modified by the pressures of circumstances both internal and external.

Since values are not static, we should not be static in our acceptance or rejection of them. On the other hand, we must be cautious in our appraisals, avoiding judgments based upon inner guilt, riddled with emotion or clouded by superficial reaction. The values we see youth express are all too often those they have seen in us. Yet too many adults avoid a true look at their own values by avoiding the discovery of what kind of youthful voice is crying beneath its rebellious tune of string and drum and horn.

Is, for example, the sexual revolution really a revolution or is it actually a challenge to bring enlightenment to mere awareness? Is it not our opportunity to offer the kind of guidance which enables the individual to convert animal energy into responsible behavior? By teaching responsibility we can open up the avenues leading to love and extension of self. Without such teaching we are contributing to the dehumanization process and in our lethargy fail to forestall that time when we relinquish to laboratory control the evolution of the species.

Now, with youth seeking and aspiring, we have an obligation to bring to their searching those attitudes and principles we hope to see them activate. This requires of us a personal commitment characterized by an inner awareness of those values which form the structure undergirding our direction in life. More than this, the commitment needs to be expressed in terms of a willingness to serve as a model for others. This two-

fold need has been described by John Gardner when he says, ". . . young people need models, both in their imaginative life and in their environment, models of what man at his best can be,"² and by Sidney Hook when he says, ". . . to teach values means to develop within students a willingness to commit themselves to new values, and to reaffirm or to reject the values to which they find themselves previously committed."³

Kluckhohn states that "A value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which includes the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action."⁴ Commenting upon this definition, George Spindler calls to our attention that "this general conception has unusual significance for educators unwilling to settle for the easy notion of education as transmission of values: it invites them to treat value determination and implementation as, at least partially, also a conscious, selective, and creative enterprise of man in culture."⁵

A Shift in Values

In his own work, Spindler has challenged us to recognize the fact that a shift is taking place in the core values of American culture. He has categorized the shift in terms of a movement from traditional to emergent values, the latter including emphases upon sociability, a relativistic moral attitude, a hedonistic, present-time orientation, and conformity.

² John W. Gardner. *Self-Renewal*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964. p. 124.

³ Sidney Hook. *Education for Modern Man*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963. p. 178.

⁴ Clyde Kluckhohn. *Mirror for Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949.

⁵ George Spindler. *Education and Culture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963. p. 100.

Significance ought to be attached to such work when we place it in proper perspective and realize that "culturally transitional populations . . . are characterized by conflict, and in most severe form—demoralization and disorganization."⁶

Yet, if we attempt to understand and to evaluate the nature of the changes taking place in our culture, we can give stability to change itself by controlling rather than being controlled. Rhoda Métraux has written that "the idea of promise, incompleteness in the present, is one way of giving Americans a sense of continuity and stability in change."⁷

To fortify ourselves for the gigantic tasks ahead, Dr. Gardner believes we prepare ourselves through "self-renewal." "But renewal—of societies or of individuals—depends in some measure on motivation, commitment, conviction, the values men live by, the things that give meaning to their lives."⁸

Such meaning does not just happen. It develops and in development it grows and in growth it blossoms and, flowering, spreads its seed. To give such meaning must be part of the work of the classroom teacher. Values belong in the classroom if youth is to be helped in its understanding of the nuances of living. Brameld has written that "insofar as American education has tended to regard its chief business as that of conveying information and training in skills, it has tended to store its values, so to speak, in the educational attic. The result is that values . . . are more often treated with a kind of sentimental deference rather than critically and constantly reinterpreted as of importance to the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁷ Rhoda Métraux. "Gaining Freedom of Value Choice." *New Insights and the Curriculum*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1963. p. 199.

⁸ John W. Gardner, *op.cit.*, p. xv.

whole theory and practice of education in a democratic culture."⁹

The classroom teacher can go to the anthropologist and the sociologist for an understanding of the meaning of values. He need only read contemporary affairs to appreciate that values are changing. He need only look about him to identify the forces influencing values. But where does he go to see his own responsibility to establish for himself an integrated perception of his role in relationship to these problems?

He must go within himself and probe all that he feels, believes and hopes to see preserved in our world in ages to come. Then, in his own small way, because he feels, believes and hopes, he can give to others and thus set in motion the first agent of preservation, the catalyst in a whole chain of values and valuing.

Self Discovery

Does he need permission? Some would say he does. Is it in fact his responsibility? Some would say he was adding frills, moving away from the basic course of study, going into the regions of controversy, violating individual sensitivities. Many arguments could be given to keep him from living in his classroom, from giving life to his students. Yet if he values his own integrity and the honor of his calling, he must be true to all that is valuable in his art. Above all else, that which is of greatest value is his ability to inspire others to find for themselves the intrinsic importance of all ideas, all facts, all knowledge, all action.

He does not wish to convert: he wants to lead others to that moment of self dis-

covey when all learners catch the true essence of what it means to be free. The moment the learner says "I" he recognizes the existence of being. When he says "am," he recognizes the existence of a fixed state. Between one such state, "I am," and the fixed state of another, "You are," there is a channel of communication which can be filled with the energy of hatred, of violence, of beauty or of love. The teacher has to lead learners to accept the responsibility for creating within that channel.

With such teachers the school can help young people see that a valuable life is a matter of voluntary choices. That decision in which they do not make a voluntary choice is either decided involuntarily or by the choice of others. This is choice by default which eventually leads to value by default. Even though a passive youth may be fortunate enough to be swayed by acceptable rather than antisocial forces, his fulfillment will not be complete, his value code will be superimposed, not self-created, his pauses at crossroads of decisions will be pauses of frustrated stagnation instead of forward thrust development. Given a situation where acceptable force values are passive and antisocial values are active, the result is inevitable—for weakness increases if it is not affected by the leadership practices of those who hold to desired values, live these values and stand by them with conviction. To demonstrate fear is to demonstrate a form of death, for fear, lethargy and complacency are not growth.

We are surrounded by a complacency which allows for much that becomes imbedded in our culture simply because it has become accepted and through acceptance has become tradition. We are society and if we do not like any of the

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⁹ Theodore Brameld. *Cultural Foundations of Education*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957. p. 13.

swer but one each of us must face up to as, at breakneck speed, we approach 1984.

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- practices of society, it is for us to change them. Any other course is an impotency denying our power to act upon the currents of time and to exercise our influence upon the waves of change.
- To be, then, is static, a mere tolerance of status quo. Our goal ought to manifest itself in becoming, in growing, in reaching out toward purposes of our own making, rather than mere conformity to standards toward which we have made no contribution. If our society is to progress, this must be the responsibility of all agents of our culture, the school being a dominant one.
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