The World of the Individual

AS SOON as one examines the question of values, he realizes that each value he holds is in conflict with some other. One of the most difficult things to do is to establish one's own identity in such a way that the most deeply held convictions encompass values which are themselves internally consistent. Only so can one think of oneself as a person of integrity and honesty, whose concern for democratic values, for example, is not violated by his own action in other particulars. Each of us has to face the question of what he lives by, what identity he wishes to establish before the world, what can identify him as the person who bears a particular name and a particular character, what actions he should take in view of the beliefs he holds.

Each of us lives in a public world and a private world simultaneously, and the character of both worlds is determined to a larger degree than most of us think by the character of our own private choosing.

We are born into a world not of our own making. We are taught by the circumstances of that world, by our family, our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, friends of the family, neighbors, teachers and people in the community. We are taught what the world wants us to become as soon as we are born into it. We are taught the habits and customs of the tribe, beginning with the children on our block, moving beyond the children on our block into our own town, our own city, our own school, our own states, our own culture, and we absorb unconsciously, through our pores, the values of the culture in which we are brought up. We believe what we are told to believe when we are young because we have as yet no other way of knowing what not to think and what to think.

We become what we experience. If our experience has been automatic and unselected, we become exactly what the world makes of us. If the central nerve of consciousness has been dulled by mechanical and repetitive reactions to the world around us, the sensitivity of consciousness disappears and we become fair game for a society which works on us through the mass media and mass education. Without the thrust of the individual and the self against custom and convention, education is nothing but the weight of established opinion placed on the shoulders of the young. Education in this sense is what Christopher Fry once
called “the domestication of the enormous miracle.”

The aim of the teacher and of true education must be to peel away the layers of custom and to give nourishment and strength to the individual consciousness which lies beneath. Otherwise, the educational effects of the rewards and punishments which society provides will train each person to be exactly alike and to perpetuate exactly his own kind. We need to remember that each generation of young people, as it comes into the world, develops its own style and its own truth, having lived through a particular expanse of time which belongs to it and to no other. Each member of each generation reflects some part of the character of his own time and starts almost imperceptibly to transform this character into something else.

As we look at the persons it is our privilege to teach, the children of each coming generation, it is therefore important for us to listen to them, to recognize what they say as they go through their own world, to understand what it is they are beginning to believe about themselves, to know what is the particular truth of their generation. We who wish to teach well and to form new programs of education appropriate to the children we are teaching are well advised to listen, as we listen to music, to the generation as it tries to tell us what it is and what are its private truths. We must listen to the total orchestration of the community of the young and to the individual voices which speak with different sounds.

Bergson has said, “The route we pursue in time leaves behind us the remnants of all that we might have been and all that we might have become.” As each generation moves from one stage to the next, it leaves behind the remnants of all it might have been and all that it might have become. It is to this process of becoming that I wish to draw attention in considering the place of the individual in the contemporary world.

It is true that the consciousness of each person is dulled by repetitive reactions to the world around him. I mean something quite specific by this consciousness. It is not merely the mind. It is the total response which each of us makes to the world around him. If we are accustomed to taking the world simply as we find it, and to accepting at face value whatever is stated to us as truth from day to day, we are failing in the duty which is ours by virtue of being human—the duty to develop the full dimension of the human consciousness. The human consciousness, if it gives itself unthinkingly and repeatedly to false demands, soon becomes unable to respond at all. It learns not to respond to the stimuli of life itself. It learns not to make commitments to ideals, and learns not to act according to belief. It learns to be noncommittal.

**A World Order**

There is a direct connection between the self and the world, a connection which, once established, makes it possible for the individual to gain sustenance and spiritual nourishment from the company of people in the world one occupies. But once the relation between the self and the world becomes one of disengagement, then the self dies and the world remains exactly the way it was before each of us entered it.

My argument then, is for a direct connection between a living, vital, imagining, conscious self and the world in which it finds itself. It is the duty of the individual to become involved with his world, to take responsibility for what happens in
it. It is the duty of educators to teach that this is so.

What is the nature of the world in which the individual now exists? The familiar facts can be described. I choose the biggest dimension for the moment—that of the total world order. I ask the question, “What is the characteristic posture of the world toward itself?” I think it is fair to say that that characteristic posture is one of threat.

The world order is held together by a series of threats, sometimes of a military kind, sometimes political, sometimes economic. If one looks at the sweep of history in the 20th century one finds that we have reached a point just now at which the threat of nuclear war, the threat of political interference, the threat of economic domination are the bases on which the world order holds itself together. In the 19th century, the world was held together by a system we have now come to speak of disparagingly as imperialism, by which a small elite in the western world controlled by military, economic and political force the entire world order. There were minor skirmishes and occasional revolutions, but the basic world pattern was set by the West and by an elite which possessed economic, military and political power with which it could deal with the rest of the world.

The chief characteristic of the 20th century lies in the breaking down of that world authority. What we now have is a fluid set of nation-states, each of them exerting its own national thrust into world affairs and wishing to have its place in the control of how the world is run. We no longer have a tidy imperialism through which the elite can run the rest. What we have is a massive world order developing its own democratic forms in a variety of ways—if by democratic forms we mean the opportunity for each nation-state to place its identity into the world order, make its own claims for its economic place, its own political place. That world order is now held together by a military net, a net of what is called counterforce, mutual deterrents or mutual threat.

We have, in terms of world government, two dominant countries, the United States and the Soviet Union, making ugly noises at each other quite frequently, part of which is meant, part of which is simply the rhetoric of politics and of threat. Because we have accustomed ourselves to thinking of the world as a system of mutual antagonisms among masses of people, rather than as a process of growth toward human brotherhood, we now accept casually the views of military strategists and military intellectuals, thousands of them, working out the arithmetic of overkill and of counterforce, designating how many deaths we would find in the Soviet Union in the event of an attack of a nuclear kind. We count them in 30 to 40 millions. We count up our own possible casualties and find that they measure 30 to 40 million. Strategists then say that if in the United States we had lost only 20 to 30 million whereas the Soviets had lost 40 million, we would have won. This is a peculiar way of thinking about human affairs. The way to reduce such abstraction to human size is to consider the reality of one child bombed, blown to pieces on the knees of its mother.

Our Goals and the Schools

In fact it is only when we consider the world in the light of the individuals who compose it that we gain any insight about the best way to organize it. We have fallen into the habit of building organiz-
tions from the point of view of how efficiently they operate, without regard for what efficiency does to the individuals within the organization. Accordingly we build larger and larger organizations for the sake of the efficiency, we crowd more and more people into larger and larger units, and, as Admiral Rickover points out, “When space around a man contracts, more rules are needed to discipline his behavior toward others. The restraints that knowing one’s neighbors imposes are lost in the anonymity of city life.”

In consequence, we have lost in an alarming degree the capacity for energetic, personal, carefree initiative or, to put it in the usual phrase, the individual has disappeared into the mass society. We need only look at the huge school systems with up to a million children in them, as in New York City, to see that it is almost impossible to find who is responsible for a given policy, or who will take the initiative to solve the city’s cruel problems.

Since 1954, and the Supreme Court decision, the educators of this country have had a moral challenge before them to do something about the integration problems of the entire country, not merely the integration problems of states in the South. Yet in terms of curricular planning and educational thinking, this kind of projection has been of a low order of significance. Planning for social change has not been high on the agenda of educators and the big problem of the social revolution in America has largely been ignored, before and after the moral challenge of May 17, 1954. That revolution is now being brought to the attention of the entire American public, including, at last, the educators, because of the protest movement of the Negro people, conducted on behalf of the Negro and of all the disenfranchised, by Negroes and whites.

One reason for the neglect of these duties within the educational system is that the system has been operating to achieve three major national goals already well established. First, the goal of military security, obligatory for a modern nation-state in a world of threats. Second, the goal of economic security. Third, the goal of political security for capitalist democracy against communism.

The educational system has been asked to serve in the achievement of these goals, and public education has become an instrument of national policy. That is to say, the dominant goals of American military, political and economic security have become the goals of the educational system. Educational reform, therefore, has come to consist of devising instruments for achieving these aims. The national talent search, for example, is conducted largely with these goals in mind. The method of the search is to classify school children in terms of their ability to pass examinations and academic tests which screen out the less able and identify those who have the most aptitude for sustaining America in the path she has chosen to take. In certain circles this is known as strengthening America against the Soviet threat.

Denial of Educational Opportunities

I believe that these goals as now pursued are limiting our country’s growth, are damaging to American education and that they hold within them a very great danger for the future of American society. The single-minded pursuit of these goals has distracted us, for example, from dealing frontally with the greatest single internal problem in the United States—the problem of the education of the Negro and his material and personal well-being.
For it is in the deprivation of education that the Negro suffers most. In his suffering he is the symbol of the suffering of all those children, white or colored, who are culturally and economically deprived, of all the Indian children, of the Spanish-American, Puerto Rican, and other minority children in the United States. They are represented in their deprivation by the example of the Negro.

It is in the lack of education by the minority groups of this country, by those with the lower incomes in those parts of the country which have not yet felt the impact of the affluent society, that the individual finds his most bitter rejection. He is shut out from the American society by reason of birth and position, the very things which we in this country have said to the world would never damage the chances or opportunity of any child or citizen.

What point is there in testing for ability and aptitude children who have had no education which could prepare them to meet such tests—tests which are irrelevant to the discovery of their talents? Or to put it more broadly, is the search for talent in this country merely to discover talent which is already developed through the privileged educational situations of white children with middle and upper middle income parents? If so, it is bound to divide the society into an elite of the educated and a mass of semi-illiterates, when so many of the latter as now classified are brimming with talent, if only it could be developed by wise and generous teaching.

Instead of facing the central question of education for everyone, we have been diverted into the mechanics of education by our concern for technological and economic progress. We have been seeking cheaper and faster ways of putting children through their academic paces. We have become fascinated by the possibilities of technological invention in speeding up the learning process, without taking thought for what is being learned and for what purpose. Teaching machines, record players, films, television classes, objective examinations graded mechanically, the use of computers and record keeping, speeded up schedules—these are all devices for the improvement of learning, but primarily they are instruments designed to hasten the coverage of subjects and curricula.

I ask us, what is the rush? Where are we going in such a hurry? Do we know? Do we know enough about the character of the individual in the American society to know what is an appropriate goal for each person in it? Rather than adopting the truly democratic philosophy in which each is asked to contribute what he has to the total welfare of the American community, we are now deciding what the total welfare of the American community should be and is, and we express this in one or another of our national goals. Then we set about producing individuals who will become the types necessary to man this establishment as it now exists. We have not thought of whether or not this establishment as it now exists is worth continuing or should be continued in its present form. When we look closely at what we are doing with the entire system of public education, we will find, I believe, that we are using it to induct the individual within this new generation of young people into an American, white, middle class, Protestant culture, based on the assumptions of a free enterprise economy, and based on the assumption that this white, middle class, Protestant, capitalist culture is the ultimate in value systems.

I submit to you that it is a second or (Continued on page 27)
commitment "Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

From its beginning, the new language program in the Albuquerque Public Schools started a dynamic ball of excitement rolling for almost every foreign language teacher—once initial incredulity gave way to curiosity. For some teachers the period is still one of imitation, of shifting back and forth, of taking and rejecting; for others the period of strict adherence to specific material—except for the purpose of maintaining articulation and sequence—and to prescribed methodology is already over; innovation, experimentation, and delving further into the science of foreign languages by individual teachers are bringing increased creativity to the classroom.

A group experiment too—made possible by the new program—is in full progress; it involves a specially devised oral comprehension test for placement of hundreds of students who speak Spanish natively into proper levels of instruction.

At the Conference on the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages, held in Tucson, Arizona, in May, a demonstration was given by a teacher and a group of her culturally deprived junior high school students. The immediate aim of the lesson was vocabulary building in a linguistics-oriented atmosphere and in the use of the words to define clearly directed areas of thought. When the lively lesson was over, the teacher mentioned something which had been evident to the audience from the start—the mutual feeling of deep respect and even of love on the part of the teacher and the students for one another. This feeling permeated the group and tempered even their most spirited disagreements. There was not a dull second, because the students sensed the genuine interest in them by a teacher with a real "bill of goods" to sell. This was Democracy at work!

Any new commitment could be tossed into a furnace such as this for an honest trial without danger of anyone's autonomy getting scorched! Certainly in the give-and-take battle of ideas in a Democracy there is is no room for a Grand Inquisitor to relieve one of one's freedom nor to take on one's sins nor to distinguish for one the difference between right and wrong! All that is needed is the selling of an idea that is worth testing and the subsequent involving of all who are sincerely concerned and who in the end will decide whether it is worth its salt or not!

World of the Individual—Taylor

(Continued from page 12)

third rate value system in its present form, that it badly needs shaking up. Moreover, it is time to stop thinking of America in terms of a tiny segment of the total wealth of cultures which exist in this country. We pay little or no attention to the extraordinary values within our Indian culture, our Negro culture, within the Spanish-American and German-American and Asian-American cultures. We need to look at ourselves as being endowed with a rich variety of cultures, not simply as the prototype of a white suburban society, the one celebrated by our educators as the high point in our educational and social system.

There are other goals of greater value than rising to the upper-middle income brackets, living in Scarsdale with 2.3 children and a wife who smiles and worries about whether her husband is being successful, with two cars in the garage, and at least one child with an IQ of 140, ready to go to Harvard. This I submit, is not the American dream as the founders of this country conceived it.
It is in the answer to these questions about values that the serious issues in education and society exist. It is to these issues that the country’s educators must address themselves if there is to be vitality and strength in the American democracy. There is no doubt that children in the elementary and high schools have the ability to do much more than they are usually asked to do and that there are a great many structural and curricular faults in the system as it now works.

The trouble is that the major emphasis among educators is not on changing the system of education to one which can distinguish among individual children and can give to each the kind of education he needs. Rather, the emphasis is on retaining the present system and pushing children through more material faster, letting the ones who do not move quickly enough fall by the wayside, to be called retarded, or drop-outs, or given other labels which mean that we have not learned to do anything with them.

Consider, for example, the rationale for the speed-up program called “Advanced Placement.” This program rests on two sensible points: that students who are ready to do advanced work in high school should go right ahead and do it without waiting for entrance to college. It also rests on the point that students who have already done the work of a given college curriculum should not be asked to repeat it.

This striking fact did not occur to the college educators over the years until some of the high school people said, “It is time you realize that you are boring your freshmen.” The solution to the problems raised by the readiness of given students for advanced work in high school is not to hurry them through courses in high school or college. The solution should be to deal with all the students in the high school at levels higher than they are now being dealt with, giving as much room for individual work and independent study as we possibly can give in order that everyone in high school can learn what it means to think for himself and what it means to work on his own.

This approach calls for sensitive counseling, sensitive teaching, and a chance for the teacher to know his students well enough to give to each the degree of freedom and independence for which he is ready. Some of our students are not ready for the degree of independence which they need to experience. Yet the solution is not to make more standard curricula through which they can all go and which turn out merely to be screening devices to see which ones of them should go to college. The effort must be to devise curricula which are adapted to the particular stage of readiness that these particular high school students in their particular part of the country with their particular background have reached by reason of their talents and the talents of their teachers.

By more sensitive counseling, I do not mean necessarily more counseling staff in the American high school. I mean that the teacher should return to the central task which was his when our big American society was smaller and easier to deal with. I am suggesting a return to the old-fashioned role of the teacher as counselor, as friend, as a person who knows the family of his students, who knows the community structure and is actually a figure within it, a teacher-counselor who teaches what he knows and who counsels because the problems of teaching and learning come up to him through the problems of his own students.

This is one place in which the Russians
have been successful with their educational system. The classes are kept small enough, the teachers are well enough trained in the task they are carrying out, both academically and personally, so that they know their students. They do not need incessant tests to find out about them. The Russians are able to do this because they spend in comparative terms, about twice the annual budget on education that we do in this country. The Russians are successful, not by reason of a heavier dose of academic subject matter given the Soviet children. They are successful because their teaching is carried on in small enough groups so that the teachers themselves can serve as sensitive counselors, as persons who know their students well enough to deal with those who are slow, with those who are fast, in the terms which the students need.

I believe it to be absurd that once the student has done advanced work in high school and is ready for college, he should be rewarded by reducing the amount of time he then spends in college before taking a college degree. A radical revision of the college freshman year is certainly needed to take account of the fact that some freshman students are more advanced in some studies than are others. This has always been the case, and many have suffered because it is the case.

The cure, however, is not to leave the present system intact and to shorten the time spent in college. This does very little for the mass of high school students who are forced to stay in the same standardized system of grade-getting and test-passing and does only a little more for those students who receive special privileges in taking courses which should be theirs in any case. Many times such high school courses are intrinsically of little value because they are merely an extension of college requirements into the high school.

The basic unwarranted assumption here is that education really consists in passing courses in school and college. Five courses a semester, two semesters a year for four years is defined as a college education. Therefore, those who can get the courses over with before attending college are considered to have had a year's worth of college education ahead of time, in spite of the fact that courses taken in high school are not college courses, since they are not taken in college and are not taught by university faculty members. As every scholar and true student knows, there is little enough time in school and college to learn even a small part of what there is to know to live a full life. The concept of education as course-taking, coupled with the principle of course-skipping for special high school students, is particularly frustrating to true learning at a time when so many college graduates are adding graduate school to their qualifications for employment. About 65 percent of the graduates of the private colleges and the better known universities go on to graduate school. Similarly, undergraduate programs are more and more considered to be preprofessional courses leading to graduate and professional education. Yet the same disease which has infected the high school curriculum and made it in large measure a testing device for admission to college has now infected the undergraduate college in relation to the graduate school. Linked to this is the trend toward year-round operation of the colleges with students allowed to graduate by rushing through courses which try to cover the same material in shorter time, simply to take the degree and get out to work or on to graduate school.

Students need time to learn. They need
the experience of reading books which are not in the curriculum. They need to attend concerts, to talk to their friends, to write poetry, to develop papers which have depth and are not merely obligatory tests. They need to have time to enjoy the life of their colleges. They need to join political organizations and participate in social controversies. They need to grow into intellectual maturity by having a chance to be by themselves without pressure of constant academic and social obligations. This is what being a student really means. It is a period in one's life in which one can look for meanings and ideas which are of no direct or practical consequence; a time when one can think about the possibilities in life and can seek and find the personal guidance one needs both from oneself and from others. All these are destroyed by the frantic rush to become one of the academically respectable types of human beings whom the educational system now rewards with its scholarships and with its honors.

The reason for studying science, whether social or natural, is that one wishes to become aware of the structure of nature, of man, of society. The student who simply works his way through courses because he has to in order to graduate is seldom touched by the spirit of true learning. Yet that is the kind of student we are creating by our present system of education.

We are also creating an uncommitted student who exhibits his attitudes toward American culture by rushing down to Daytona Beach with 65 to 70 thousand members of his age-group and by expressing the American dream to himself, to his friends and to the world by becoming drunk on the beaches, throwing beer cans at policemen and getting arrested. I cite this as an arithmetical sum of the value system of the American student whose ideas have been created by the social system itself. Sixty-five thousand young people spend what is estimated at 5 million dollars for a period of one week to 10 days, the money being spent in the affluent society at a time when 5 million dollars would educate a large number of poverty-stricken young people for quite a long while.

Perhaps it is not without meaning that 65,000 young people celebrate their attitude toward life by the visit to Daytona Beach, while just 60 students during this same period went to Mississippi to work with the Negro youth on problems of voter registration. I think this represents approximately the balance of values which we are teaching within the school and college community: the 65,000 for the beer cans, and the 60 to work at the most significant issue in contemporary American life.

Teaching: A Way of Life

The recruitment of new sources of human energy to solve the problems of the world, which at the moment are going unsolved by the fact that we have not tackled them frontally, must be the task of the recruitment offices of our teachers colleges. I am one who believes that the teachers colleges are the central educational institutions of the whole country. I am one of the few who like the term "teachers colleges." I do not wish us to evade the facts of our responsibility simply by calling them such names as multipurpose universities. Such indirection hides the fact that there are institutions where teachers are prepared and that these are among the most important institutions of the country. They must be recognized as such.

We need to rethink the way in which we are developing the corps of young
persons who are coming into teaching. We need to reach out to those who are looking for a way of life of which they can be proud, we need to help in the search of the American youth to find a place in his society where he is needed, and an identity which he can find worthy of his own respect. This is a major problem for the teachers colleges and in the recruitment of new teachers.

The kind of person who should be coming into the teaching profession is exactly the kind who wishes to serve abroad in the Peace Corps, who wishes to serve in a domestic Peace Corps. We should urge a federal program for foreign students to come to this country to work in our colleges in order to help us with our problems so that we may no longer think that we are the only persons who can export educational expertise to other countries. We need to bring to our teachers colleges those students from abroad who can help to teach us about their own cultures, the facts of their own situation in the world today. We might go on from there to do such imperative things as abolishing the credit system by which we now keep track of the academic details of American education. We could follow that by abolishing the entire grading system as a way of judging students. We need to abolish the notion that every step of the way for the student from the age of 7 to the age of 18 must be measured in terms of tests. Those experiments which are under way with ungraded classes and which allow individuals within the schools to move at the pace most appropriate to them provide another way by which we can loosen up and change our system.

We also need to get rid of the idea which has been perpetuated by Dr. Conant’s report on the education of teachers that there is a sharp distinction to be made between proficiency in academic subject matter on the one hand and proficiency in practice teaching on the other.

We owe to Dr. Conant a great debt of gratitude for having brought before the American public the necessity of concentrating our attention on what should be done to reform the education of the American teacher. Dr. Conant has pointed out that until we learn how to develop teachers who know what they are talking about within the fields of academic subject matter, we will never have a system of education with high intellectual standards.

Yet when we go beyond that to ask ourselves the question, “How are we going to regenerate the whole culture?”, we must look for the roots of experience within the society itself. We must give to our teacher candidates that kind of direct experience with their world by which they can establish their own identity in that world.

We must work toward developing a high intensity of interest on the part of students for learning the subjects which they wish to know and which they intend to teach. The student-teacher who is interested in English literature should become to some degree a literary critic; he must be an addicted reader whose knowledge of contemporary and past literature is broad and deep. At the same time, the teacher of literature should have had experience in life in the years interspersed with his education as a teacher, either abroad or in this country, so that he becomes directly related to his society and is not simply a transmitter of the cultural values which he has been taught to transmit.

We also need to look at what can happen in the curriculum itself when we give concentrated attention to the reform of its content. Each person in the teach-
ing profession needs to be working continually at the content of his own courses. His teaching should be as much his personal expression as is the painting to the painter or the novel to the novelist. He needs to be continually thinking about what he is doing—not relying on national reports, not waiting for those who are supposedly better informed than himself about the areas of subject matter in which he is teaching. Each teacher must take, as his personal mission, the perfection of his own style of teaching, the development of his own curriculum, so that he can become the chief critic of the curriculum of the national educational system, not simply leaving it to a national consensus to decide what is appropriate.

A 14 year old boy, in answer to a question from the Putney School on his application form for admission, said what he thought he wanted to do with his education: "To make a valuable contribution with my life," he said, "is the only way I can assure myself that I have value."

I think he is right. It is the only assurance we have for believing that what we are doing makes a difference.

I wish to return to the statement with which I began. Each of us lives in a public and a private world at the same time. The task of each, if he is to be a true teacher, is to enrich his own private world in such a way that he has something to give to the public world by reason of which it may be enhanced. I urge therefore that we think of the development of humanity and the development of teaching and teachers in the same set of terms. The man who learns to understand something about the structure of nature, of man and of society is by that fact more fully human. The man who learns to put together a body of knowledge about nature, man or society, not only because these matters interest him but because he wishes to share with others what it is he has discovered, is by that fact a teacher. He then has a double responsibility before the world—to continue to add to his store of knowledge and to continue the search for ways in which others may more readily come to know what he knows.

In that way he continues to be himself—that most difficult of all the arts.

Studying and Learning—Loving
(Continued from page 14)

you teach commitment, by having an opportunity to study and to live the American ideals. Schools, too, could do this if they would.

2. Five hundred high school student council members and school club leaders met at the University of Michigan to talk about their role as youth leaders in the present social upheaval. They heard a speaker talk about the shortcomings of United States Information Libraries in the Orient. Materials in these libraries offered little information about those Americans who were nonwhite and non-Christian. At the close of the speech the students sent a telegram to Washington and within ten days received an answer stating the matter would be looked into. This was a commitment. Who taught this and how?

3. A group of ultraconservative Americans in a suburban area of one of our prominent cities threatened a school board and forced it to cancel an invitation to the commencement speaker, a Negro professor from a large university.

All the mass media in the area, particularly radio and television, deplored this action, so that a substitute could not be found. It was finally agreed a school