THE LEARNING OF SYMBOLIC BEHAVIOR
AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO EDUCATION

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NOT EVERY parent is aware how symbolic are the values of the young child. The child wants this teddy-bear but not that doll, prefers the merry-go-round to the boat ride and demands a lemon-stick instead of licorice—and it should be clear how little any of these objects or experiences possess of what the adult would call "intrinsic value." The intensity of the child's wish is as though the choice were between gold and lead—or even between life and death, yet an analysis of the choice shows that nothing so "objective" is involved. But this does not mean that the choice is simply spiteful or capricious. The highly "rational" parent may view the choice as such, however, and will be further appalled to find that the reasons which the child gives, upon demand, seem absurd. But the child shows that he really means it when he says he wants X instead of Y and the sensitive adult may get enough alarmed either to gratify or appease the child, hoping, by this concession to "irrationality," that he can still eventually make the child a "sensible" human being like himself. It seems in such cases that the child has meaningful reactions yet is unable to communicate his meaning even to the grown-ups who love him most.

The psychologist, on the other hand, will make more of an attempt to infer the meaning of the child's values. He will point out that getting pop-corn and avoiding root-beer have nothing whatever to do with the socially established values of pop-corn and root-beer, but that, for some cause of previous association or identification, pop-corn may signify security, love, or attention while root-beer may mean rejection, reluctance, or indifference. Of course these abstract psychological words are for the parent's benefit and would not designate anything to the child. Pop-corn, for the child, may only remind him of the day he went to Playland with Daddy—who ignores him so much of the time. Even the psychologist, without an intimate knowledge of the child's history, would be at a loss to determine the specific importance which the child gives to pop-corn. But it would still seem that pop-corn, originally provided by Daddy at Playland, has become a symbolic instrument for recapturing the experiences of excite-

ment, recognition, and paternal love which were present in the original stimulus situation. Were the child a mere animal the response to (and preference for) pop-corn would be probably extinguished if, after a time, the pop-corn did not bring another trip to Playland along with it. But with a symbol-using human, extinction may not occur and the individual *may* continue ("irrationally") to prefer pop-corn for the rest of his life. What Gardner Murphy has called "inner symbolic satisfactions" may become permanently compressed with and affixed to this one class of symbolic object (e.g., the pop-corn). Here, at least on a speculative basis, one can see a partial description of the transition from the associational or sign-conditioning of the animal to the cognitive or symbolic conditioning of the human being.

But it is not only the child's value-hierarchy (his valence towards or away from certain objects) which seems to acquire this symbolic quality. An increasing portion of the child's behavior—both verbal and non-verbal—also takes on such unique significance. To the parent the child seems "unrealistic"; much of his play, fantasy, and talk seem to lack "intrinsic worth." Socialization, then, requires correcting a good deal of this autistic behavior and eventually training the child to do and value things as his parents do. The parent is apt to view the success of this training as a matutinal event—as the final dawning of "good sense," "reason," "realism," and "maturity." But this is an adulto-morphic projection, for it is questionable whether any such magical transformation "inside the child" has occurred. The new more acceptable conduct of the socialized child is probably of the same cloth as his former autistic behavior. The parents have simply grasped (intuitively) the child's symbolic mechanism and, *without changing that mechanism,* have plied it with rewards and punishments so as to redirect (and stabilize the meanings of) certain important activities. The child may still be living amid dreams and magic and merely continue his play-acting in the new symbolic environment whose constancy of benefits and reprisals he has been forced to respect. No divination has necessarily taken place; he does not see his new social world as any more *real* than his former private one; and he may laterally retain the private one as well. The "growing up" process thus involves no change in "seeing what's what" but only a change in what *means* what. It may well be asked whether, in the ontogeny of the human mind, "realism" and "social adjustment" have any meaning beyond this.

THE PRIVATE symbols of the child become social symbols when other people use and respond to them the same way the child does. When this happens *communication* occurs. Now the symbols of gesture and speech are normally the first to attain this social, communicative function. Today, however, psychologists are beginning to realize that such communal symbolism is by no means limited to gesture and speech as most people have usually assumed. The non-gestural, non-verbal behavior which, as we have suggested, is often so patently

symbolic in the pre-socialized, autistic stage, likewise tends to become socially symbolized and to become, along with formal language, an instrument of communication. Hence walking as well as talking, choking as well as scowling, are subject to symbolic use. The adult distinction between *saying* and *doing, communicating* something and *being* something, causes this basic purposive and functional similarity to be overlooked. The overlooking is responsible in education, for example, for an artificial separation between what the student symbolizes, especially through his speech and writing, and what he supposedly "is" *behind* the symbolization. If the foregoing generalizations about behavioral development have any validity, educators are thus at least obligated to investigate some of the scientific theories and findings on which they are based. The entire concept of the student's personality is involved here. The task of the next few pages is to provide a review of some of the modern background developments which could give such a communicative theory of education plausibility if not considerable potency.

1. The "Role-taking" of George H. Mead

ONE of the more important conceptual frameworks now influencing sociology and anthropology is based on the metaphor of "role-taking" as a description of the process whereby the individual gets socialized. In its germinal form this notion sprang from the theories of the nineteenth century social psychologist Charles Cooley, whose expression "the looking-glass self" epitomized the way in which any appropriate member of society must see himself as others see him. The present importance of Cooley's thought, however, lies in the elaboration it received at the hands of George H. Mead, long time philosopher and social psychologist at the University of Chicago, whose name is generally found beside those of Peirce, James, and Dewey as a leading exponent of American pragmatism.

Mead's special contribution to experimentalist thinking can be found in his focus upon the social nature of individual cognition and reflection and in his explanation of conscious behavior as a tendency to act in terms of the dominant symbols of the culture. When the child reaches the point where he reacts to his own gestures and speech the way his parents, *et al.*, react to them, he then begins to view himself as a separate object in the way that other people view him. He then "takes the role of the other" in relation to himself; he sees himself as another among the many other citizens; he accepts their sets of rights and duties and imposes them on himself; he judges himself and modifies his behavior accordingly. The process is completed as the child moves in wider circles than his own family. He comes to strike a consensus of the roles which the many others take towards him; he generalizes from these roles in the attitude he takes towards himself. In short, he takes the role of the "generalized other"; he thus comes to exemplify a kind of montage of the public evaluations of himself—

and he becomes an average citizen in both his self-judgment and his behavior.

It is from this last stage of social incorporation that consciousness in the fully adult sense finally emerges. As Mead describes it,

> the social organization of perspectives arises through the individual's taking the role of the other within a social act whose varied phases are in some sense present in his organism. When, therefore, he has within the social act stimulated himself to act as the other, he has aroused the beginnings of the act of the other in relationship to his own act and the whole process. These tendencies control the expression of the response and become the generalized other, conversation with whom constitutes thought.[1]

Mead's philosophy in this way revolves itself into a kind of very sophisticated animism, in which even one's relation to physical objects requires putting one's self in the position of the object—as though the object were another human being. "The earliest objects are social objects," he said, "and all objects are at first social objects. Later experience differentiates the social from the physical objects, but the mechanism of the experience of things over against the self as an object is the social mechanism." [2] Our cognition of the external world first arises in separating it from ourselves by taking the role of others who have already made this separation. Conscious behavior is thus at bottom a social act and its underlying function is the "conversation of gestures," the expression of needs through symbols held in common. The lonely astronomer is thus just as much a social creature as the politician. He gives his stars personalities, so to speak. He looks at the star as though the star were looking at him.

DESPITE its Hegelian language, Mead's concept of role-taking has called attention to the study of human behavior, and especially of learning, as a communicative process. With respect to the learned behavior of the American school child it is easy to see how Mead's description may offer a useful statement of many of the kinds of problems to be encountered. With the multiplicity of cultural backgrounds which characterizes this nation, a suitable "generalized other" is much more difficult to find than in most cultures. The child no sooner finds what he considers the appropriate role towards himself than his social environment changes and he gets into trouble. The perspective of the teacher would thus be improved if he quit asking what kind of child the student *is*, what is he *really like*, and instead asked who are the *others* whose role he is taking, what kind of a person is he *trying* to become. This sort of approach, as shall be presently shown, is only a beginning and can today be pursued far beyond the stage at which Mead left it. But even in this stage it represents a revolutionary change from the educational attitudes of the past.

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[1] George H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 610.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 428.

In more recent years Mead's concepts have received supplementation and elaboration from other sources. One of these is the Lewinian school of "group dynamics research." Another is the "sociometry" of J. L. Moreno, whose techniques of "psychodrama" and "sociodrama" represent therapeutic efforts to change personalities by inducing flexibility in taking one's own and others' roles. But the most recent and perhaps most formidable development in this direction has been the work of the so-called "action theorists," represented by such thinkers as Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, and Robert Bales.[3] These scientists have distinguished symbolic from purely behavioristic mechanisms of adjustment and have tried to account for socialization as a way of learning to play satisfactory roles—a process which is seen as continuous from the early "cathectic-evaluative" mechanisms of our pre-symbolic childhood. The close relationship between symbolism, "consciousness," and "social adjustment" is thus being increasingly perceived; and many more specific theories and findings may be expected from such research in the next few years.

The emphasis in these trends is on the interpersonal determinants of behavior, a subject to be treated again in discussing the Sullivanian school of psychiatry. Considered interpersonally, behavior must in some sense be regarded as a dramatic activity; its function is at least in part manipulative and its aim is to send messages which will bring at least appropriate, if not desirable, social responses. The ability to behave this way on a sophisticated plane is probably a function of man's capacity to symbolize. This capacity, still largely a mystery, has nevertheless become the subject of increasing attention and evaluation in the past few years. It is for this reason that we shall next turn to the theories of the late Trigant Burrow whose physiological and medical analysis of symbolism has been in some ways more directly related to behavioral semantics.

2. PHYLOANALYSIS

ONE of the more interesting treatments of the role of symbolism in human behavior has come from thirty years of study by the Lifwynn Foundation of Westport, Connecticut, under the scientific direction of Trigant Burrow. Burrow was one of America's first Freudian analysts and also one of the first to break with Freud and join the heretical parade. Feeling that Freud's interpretations of behavior disorders were inadequate, Burrow developed his own system of "phyloanalysis" which "regards the neurosis as an internal tensional disorder that affects mankind throughout" and whose "therapeutic emphasis is directed toward a basic physiological reorientation of the total organism in relation to the total environment." [4] Drawing upon the findings of holistic physi-

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[3] Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (ed.), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

[4] Trigant Burrow, *The Biology of Human Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 419.

ologists like Coghill and Lashley, Burrow postulated a normal state of the human organism based on its phylogenetic development—a state of harmony, balance, and equilibrium. The villain which has thrown modern man off this state was held to be the set of symbolic social relationships which grew up after the Renaissance and which emphasized the ego (the "I-persona") and the special "cortical, symbolic identity" of the individual to the neglect of the rest of his body. While in fact representing only a "secondary, peripheral system of the organism," the "I-persona" has usurped the function of the organism as a whole, creating the modern neurotic man.

While Burrow's therapeutic prescriptions seem to be based on some kind of "natural man," "healthy animal" ideal—and are thus subject to considerable criticism by semanticists, his stress on the symbolic causes of human pathology placed his close to the views of Korzybski—a proximity Burrow refused to acknowledge. In Burrow's eyes the balance-sheet on language was about even.

> But if through his acquirement of the symbolic faculty man is endowed with a tremendous asset, if through his facility of symbolic abstraction he has lifted himself to heights infinitely beyond the level of other animals, he has by the same token incurred very heavy liabilities—liabilities so heavy that it may be truly said that man has descended as far below the animals as he has risen above them.[5]

To Burrow it was

> evident that in supplanting the brain's total function with the partitive activation of the symbolic segment, man, as an individual and as a community has artificially substituted an artifact of behavior for the primacy of the organism's behavior as a phylic and unitary whole.[6]

Not only the language of man, but his values, feelings, attitudes and postures are thus subject to this pathological symbolic influence. "Under the tyrannical domination of this spurious persona, the very organs of one's body become sick." [7]

THE RELEVANCE of Burrow's argument to our present discussion lies in its suggestions, backed by considerable clinical and laboratory evidence, that wide and unsuspected ranges of our behavior are symbolically determined; and that many neurotic, psychotic, and somatic disturbances may be due to the restrictions and directives of our "artificial" symbolic life. The other part of Burrow's argument—that somehow organic wholeness can be restored merely by destroying this symbolic tyranny—seems to this writer highly questionable. There is no evidence that the underlying curative processes which are relied

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[5] Trigant Burrow, *The Neurosis of Man* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 71.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

upon to correct the symbolic distortions and imbalances are not themselves symbolic—that they are not just a different kind of dramatic and linguistic behavior. It is doubtful that man can actually save himself by some supposed return to nature because his distinctive attribute as a species is that he is trained to substitute symbols *for* nature. Nevertheless we may be thankful to Burrow for pointing out how far away from "nature" we have actually moved and how communicative even our bodies have become. The next task is to examine a contemporary system of psychology which has capitalized heavily upon the possibilities opened by such men as Mead, Moreno, and Burrow for explaining man as a communicating animal.

3. INTERPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

WITHIN the traditions of psychoanalysis and especially clinical psychology a new approach to human behavior has been emerging in the past few years. The psychobiology of Adolf Meyer made the first systematic attempt after Freud to view the human being as a whole person and to unite biology with psychiatry. In contrast to Burrow, Meyer argued that the use of symbols and meanings ("mentation") provided the integration of the personality and his "grasp of reality." [8] Meyer's concepts were adopted by William Alanson White (1870-1937) who founded the Washington School of Psychiatry. White felt that the science of psychiatry should not be oriented solely in the mental hospital, but that its principles applied to life generally and to the whole business of human affairs.[9] White thus could not divorce his interest in personal pathology from his knowledge of society and could not avoid the application of his psychiatric thinking to the most crucial social situations. The person carrying the thinking of Meyer and White to its greatest fulfillment was the late Harry Stack Sullivan who became the main figure of the Washington School of Psychiatry and whose name is by now permanently attached to the interpersonal explanation of personality.

Sullivan believed that human beings, more than any other species, were *social* creatures. They are "born *young*," in the first place; they are physiologically less mature, more helpless, at delivery than any other organisms, and thus are more dependent on the adults who bear and care for them. This unusual dependence on the adult makes the human unusually anthropocentric in his reactions to the environment. Just as animals react defensively to storm clouds and crackling leaves, the human infant is most appalled by any disturbance in the adult who mothers him. For this reason the key concept in Sullivan's repertoire of psychological categories is *anxiety.* The worried parent "transmits" his con-

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[8] Harry Stack Sullivan, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953), p. 9.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

cern and uncertainty to the child; the slight hesitations, changes of voice and barely noticeable ineptitudes of the anxious mother are storm warnings to the child—who then becomes uncertain and anxious himself. It is thus of permanent importance to the child that he gets mother to do the desired and expected thing; and the more unsure the child is, the more he will experiment to evoke some kind of reliable and consistent behavior from his protector. It is necessary for the child to adopt those modes of behavior which, in the long run, provoke the greatest number of satisfying and anxiety-removing responses from the significant adults in his life.

Human behavior therefore has a very early inception in the context of interpersonal relations. Sullivan emphasized

> the realization that the field of psychiatry is neither the mentally sick individual, nor the successful and unsuccessful processes that may be observed in groups and that can be studied in detached objectivity. Psychiatry, instead, is the study of processes that involve or go on between people. The field of psychiatry is the field of interpersonal relations, under any and all circumstances in which these relations exist. It was seen that *a personality can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being.*[10]

This stress on the interpersonal determinants of the personality forced Sullivan to pay major attention to those learned responses which most directly affect the interpersonal situation of the child. And this led him to an interest in language and symbolism.

BECAUSE symbolism is interpersonal in its origins and functions, Sullivan denied the conventional view that it develops as a relatively late manifestation which somehow gets superimposed on an already formed non-symbolic personality.

> Perhaps the first time anything happens it is non-symbolic. But from the very beginning the cooperation of older people is necessary for infantile survival; and from the very beginning the potent influence of anxiety permits the organization of experience, prevents the organization of experience, or gradually shoos the direction of experience into approved channels. Thus it is quite obvious that a great deal of what goes on by the time one is a year old, even if it is inborn, is very highly symbolic. . . . I am afraid that, for practical purposes, all human behavior so purely and unquestionably manifests the organization of experience into what are in effect signs—whether signals or symbols—that an attempt to discriminate intelligibly in human behavior between what is symbolic and what is non-symbolic is far more misleading than it is helpful. Therefore, without denying that there may be purely nonsymbolic performances in human beings, I would say that for the purposes of psychiatric theory I am con-

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[10] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

cerned exclusively with covert and overt symbolic activity—that is, with activity influenced by the organization into signs of previous experience in terms of satisfaction, or in terms of avoiding or minimizing anxiety.[11]

Although Sullivan's development of his theories was far more complicated and elaborate than can be presented here, it can be granted that his psychiatric approach required explaining the growth of personality in terms of the early symbolic interacting relationships of the child with his significant adults.

Sullivan's evidence for his views was derived largely from his clinical impressions and never emerged in a highly systematic or scientific form. In the last few years, however, a number of research methodologists and clinical experimenters have been attempting to set up measurement apparatuses and to give operational meaning to the study of interpersonal behavior. Robert Bales, Herbert Thelen, W. R. Bion, and H. A. Murray have been making pioneering contributions towards the identification of intragroup variables and the refinement of diagnostic tools. A culmination of some of their work has appeared more recently in the project of the Kaiser Foundation Psychological Laboratory of Oakland, California. Under the research direction of Timothy Leary, Hubert Coffey, Ralph La Forge, and others, a new "multilevel" conception of the personality has been developing which gives the variables of social interaction a priority they have never enjoyed in any rigorous psychological system.

THE KAISER experimenters have made clear the clinical and philosophical path they are treading. In the words of Leary and Coffey, they are

> following Sullivan . . . emphasizing the interpersonal aspects of behavior, and . . . making the assumption that the essence of human happiness and despair, success and failure, centers in the manner in which the person consistently sees, symbolizes, and communicates with others.[12]

In their efforts to make Sullivan's concepts "operational," the Kaiser researchers have proceeded through a gross empiricism which has accepted and correlated the various kinds of data on which the various rival systems of psychology (Freudian, behavioristic, gestalt, etc.) have been built. The various "levels" of data include the specifically interpersonal (i.e. the overt reactions an audience has to a subject and a subject to his audience), the directly conscious (i.e. the way the subject sees himself as revealed in questionnaires) and the classical unconscious (i.e. the material evoked from a Thematic Apperception Test or from therapeutic diagnosis). All these "multi-level" data have been accepted for

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[11] Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953), p. 186.

[12] Timothy Leary and Hubert S. Coffey, "Interpersonal Diagnosis: Some Problems of Methodology and Validation," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, L (1955), p. 111.

precisely what they are, namely, data, and the job has been to see what could be made out of them. The new system has itself been expressed in a "descriptive behavioristic terminology" in which inferences to unobservable entities or conditions have been tabooed; clinical diagnosis has been made so "automatic" that an ordinary clerk can do it, as nothing more is involved than distributing the behavioral data along pre-designed scales and making the required computations. Observed reports, specially constructed check-lists and some standard personality tests have been the structuring instruments through which the data have been solicited and filtered.

Despite the eclectic nature of this methodology, interpersonal influences are believed to reign throughout the evidence received. Even where so-called "unconscious" material is accredited (as with the Thematic Apperception Test), the interpretation is made in terms of the "interpersonal security operations" which, by definition, are involved. And the validating criterion so far used has been obviously interpersonal, that is, the behavior of patients under group-therapy. As Leary has written,

> The empirical unit by which social interactions are categorized is called the interpersonal reflex—defined as the social impact which the subject's action has on the other person. In discussing this, I have tried to stress the automatic and often involuntary way in which human beings 'train' or provoke others to react in consistent ways.[13]

Thus it is in the study of the life-long attempts of people to "train" other people to regard them in a certain way, that the dynamics of human behavior, as purely human, are to be sought.

It is easy to tie this concept of behavior to that of role-playing, as Leary has done.

> Almost everyone manifests certain role patterns which he automatically assumes in the presence of each significant other person in his life. These roles are probability tendencies to express certain interpersonal purposes with significantly higher frequency. The person may be quite unaware of these spontaneous tendencies—to complain to his wife, to be stern with his children, to boss his secretary, to depend on the office manager. . . . When evidence is obtained that he consistently and routinely tends to favor certain mechanisms with one person significantly more than can be explained by chance, and tends to pull certain responses from others to a similar degree, then a role relationship can be said to exist.[14]

And equally it becomes possible to explain large portions of behavior as symbolic or communicative acts.

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[13] Timothy Leary, "The Theory and Measurement Methodology of Interpersonal Communication," *Psychiatry*, XVIII (1955), p. 161.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

The concern at this level is *what* one person communicates to another. A father, for example, may employ one or one thousand words to refuse his child's request. The mode, style and content of the two rejecting expressions may be very different, but their interpersonal purpose is the same—rejection.[15]

L EARY's metaphor of "train" could perhaps be more vividly expressed as "send messages." For message-sending is the peculiarly human form of training which human beings inflict on one another: it involves educing appropriate responses from others by *symbolic* behavior. The purpose is to get *other people* to accept the subject as such and such a *kind of person.* The desired reputation of the subject may be socially favorable, as in the case of most normal people, or even downright anti-social (e.g. detestable, hateful), as with some (but not all) pathological people. But in any case, by his choice of messages, techniques and roles, the individual takes (at least on a common sense basis) some measure of self-determining responsibility for what society thinks of him and does to him. He cannot in any valid sense *blame* others for their reactions to him, for he himself, as Leary has also emphasized, has manipulated these reactions, often with great skill.[16] This concept of eliciting consistent social responses through symbolic exhibitions is likewise consistent with the belief in the unconsciously maneuvered consequences of behavior, so long professed by many of the Freudians.

The work of the Kaiser Foundation psychologists is still in a crude beginning stage, although predictive validation has already been claimed with a number of personality "types." If the communicative metaphor has applicability, however, it is easy to see why psychiatric nosology is immensely more difficult than the usual organic diagnosis. Just as in any national language there are an indefinite number of ways of saying the same thing, so the symbolic repertoire for training others to respond in the same way (or sending the same behavioral message about oneself) may be widely fluctuating and at times even completely deceiving to one who does not know the "code." It follows, of course, that the statistical results of a person's behavior—preferably gathered over a long period and in a variety of social situations—are much more telling indices of the fundamental life-long messages of a person than any immediate or specific act. Behavior, from this point of view, must nevertheless be not merely observed, like the movement of rats, but must be interpreted or "read," as we read a book or have so long "read" other human faces. But to "read" behavior this way requires a knowledge of the language in which the behavior is "written"—of the "play" in which the "role" is cast. And there is no dictionary for this "language," no script for the "play." For almost every person the "code" *is* in part unique,

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[15] *Ibid.,* p. 148.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 158.

private and secret. The diagnostician must usually rely on the statistical results to get the first clues; then by painstaking observation and collation, the behavioral techniques may be eventually "deciphered."

4. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

IT IS NOW time to discuss the possible educational consequences of the theories and research which have here been reviewed. The hope is to suggest at least one possible new way of judging student and teacher behavior—a way that follows consistently from broad interests of behavioral semantics.

To look upon human behavior as in part a role-taking, message-sending or training enterprise is to place great weight upon the early years of socialization when the child is going to school. The first school years loom especially important, because it is then that the child begins to find the sort of "generalized other" which adequately represents the community in which he will spend his life. It is in this period, with the teachers (those strange substitute parents) and with a social and psychological cross-section of his peers, that he begins to develop that flexibility of response and maneuver which will determine how well he will get the world to accept him for what he wants to be.

Classical education was not well equipped to recognize this situation, as it assumed the existence of underlying "souls," "personalities," or "minds" which simply were what they were and which merely learned how to express or to conceal themselves as a result of education. The experimentalist revolution was a long step forward from the traditional conceptions, because it stressed the importance of the activity factor in shaping the personality. By attributing character and mind-making powers to problem-solving behavior and to social interactions, the pragmatist called attention to the countless watersheds of human development which were encountered right in the classroom. Yet by its orientation in the biological metaphor to describe the process of education, pragmatism still looked for some kind of animal-like reality inside the child, some quantity of strain or tension for whose decrease learning would be the instrument. The experimentalists were on the right path in regarding language and knowledge as instrumental to the satisfaction of needs, but they too often construed this satisfaction as the attainment of some measurable release of stress by the organism. Childs has, for example, interpreted the "biological approach" of experimentalism as meaning that

> The organism must constantly act so as to bring about adjustments favorable to its own interests. . . Biologically a need is seen in that redistribution of energies which upsets the equilibrium of the organism-environment relationship and results in a vital tension. When such a disturbance occurs, the organism acts to reduce the strain.[17]

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[17] John L. Childs, *Education and the Philosophy of Experimentalism* (New York: The Century Co., 1931), p. 72.

THE COMMUNICATIVE approach suggested here would, on the other hand, perceive satisfaction as (at least often) involving only the successful completion of a message, the manipulation of an appropriate social response. It differs from the experimentalist criterion in that it denies that any reduced tension is necessarily involved; the message has, to use Allport's expression, a "functional autonomy" which supersedes any genetic factors of a physiological kind. One has only to look at the many pathological people who become anxious only when they are *not* in trouble and whose success with messages and roles succeeds in aggravating rather than diminishing their measurable organic tension. These people, along with the rest of us, simply have something important that they want to *say* to the world. Depending on *what* they have to say (about themselves), the success of their communication must be judged by what other people do to them—and successful reciprocation may range from love and esteem to hate and infamy.

One of the main insights which has come out of the interpersonal study of behavior is that so many humans, in the course of a lifetime of vicissitudes, become so remarkably skilled and artistic in evoking consistent responses from others. Trouble comes when they judge their results by the demands of a society which may regard them as total failures—overlooking, as Leary has stressed, the talent and ingenuity by which they managed to fail so well. Modern education, then, should make an effort to appreciate better the clever machinery by which students (and teachers!) attain their (often unconscious) interpersonal ends—however tragic or anti-social they may be. It has been the custom to appraise only the results of this machinery and to ignore the skill required in its operation. A greater awareness by the teacher and student of the symbolic "genius" that it often takes to become known as a "delinquent," "a trouble maker," or even "a square" will indicate a wealth of hidden resources which might then be more easily turned into constructive social directions. There is a bit of irony in the fact that a person who shows amazing deftness in evoking social scorn should himself come to accept society's judgment that he is a fool.

5. THE TEACHER'S TASK

THE CHIEF psychological and educational problem is to investigate the direction and dynamism of these message-sending patterns which usually develop early in life. The teacher, being concerned with the survival of our society and the preservation of its values, must come to judge his students' "messages" accordingly. He must not ask "What kind of student *is* he?", but "What kind of person is he trying to *say* he is?" "And is this message as sent by this particular student, a healthy one for our society? And, if it is not, what can be done to change it? What put him in the habit of sending this message in the first place?" Questions like these, which have long been intuitively asked by many good teachers, would give a new angle to educational evaluation and diagnosis.

They would make the student's behavior more changeable in the teacher's eyes. They would remove him from the obloquy or fortune of an absolute status and give him the benefit of having choices, options, and alternatives in his future growth.

At the same time, such a communicative psychology will give new needed force to the experimentalist injunction to have the student understand and accept the consequences of his acts. There is a kind of sentimentalism in American education which regards too many students as *merely* sick, *unable* to change and *non-responsible* for what happens to them. Once the student's personality is removed from the limbo of some metaphysical "self" or from the rigid determinism of ecological forces, and is regarded as merely the total configuration of his interpersonal communicative acts, his ability to change will be more respected. The ordinary wisdom commonly regards people as more free and responsible for what they *say* than for what they *are*. This, of course, is a subtle and complex problem, but the question can be seriously raised whether we have not too long taken people *to be* what they say they are rather than simply as *saying* what they say they are. A reorientation here would at least allow the teacher to agree with Leary that

> The idea of self-determination removes the protective devices of projection and externalization, giving in return a priceless, but often unwelcome, gift of personal power. If you made yourself and your world, then you can change yourself and your world. Since your own interpersonal communications have woven the unique tapestry of your life, then you are the only one who can create or change the pattern. The responsibility for the past and the endowment for the future are in your hands.[18]

Lest this point of view be over-interpreted to say that human being are completely "free," we should be aware of the obvious limiting conditions to any person's "training privileges." One's physical size and shape, his ethnic identity, and the whole complex of hereditary and cultural influences which affect him are clearly "facts" which he can't do much about and which place a tether on the range of social reactions he can provoke. But within the circle of this tether there are still many possibilities. If an individual says "Society mistreats me because I have dark skin," the proper answer is, "Yes, you are right. Society does mistreat you because of your dark skin. But it also mistreats you in the way it does because *you* have trained it to respond to your dark skin in the way it does." It is certainly true that in certain cultural climates *some* form of social "mistreatment" is inevitable for this individual, but we must not forget that even in the most oppressive situations, there is far more variance of social response possible than many victims of these situations find it comfortable to admit.

The goal of the school to train our future democratic citizens makes the acknowledgment of self-responsibility extremely urgent. In a world in which

[18] See footnote 16.

authoritarian leadership threatens the survival of democracy, the principle of self-determination (however troublesome its metaphysical status) becomes of the foremost ethical importance. Full acknowledgment by the citizens in our democracy of their own responsibility for "the state of the Union"—for depression or prosperity, for war or peace—is an imperative educational objective. When the American people come to admit that they themselves have partly trained their leaders or even their enemies to do what they have done to them, the prospect for a more responsible and informed electorate will rise. It is already evident that the "bad reputation" of America in much of the world is not to be ascribed to some "badness" in America but to the fact that we have effectively communicated a set of messages which provoke rejection. If Americans were just a "bad lot" they could hardly be blamed for it or expected to change; consequently many Americans rather prefer to think they *are* "bad." But since they are just *training* the world to think they are "bad," the responsibility is fully theirs. Once we regard even our most powerful political and economic trends as being in part "messages" we are sending abroad, our frequent fatalism about their effects may also be lifted.