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Mr. Theodore Newcomb

PSYCHOLOGY, MENTAL HYGIENE, AND FREEDOM

A psychologist is recently quoted as saying that whoever reaches happiness and success is, whether he knows it or not, a good psychologist. Now this man was using the word "psychology" in a very particular sense; namely, as an applied science. Applied science or technology represents the application to certain practical demands of the findings of what is sometimes known as "pure" science. The latter represents objective statements of observed phenomena and their relationships, quite apart from any practical use to which they may be put. Now, applied science borrows, not only from pure science, but it also proceeds on certain assumptions of value; that is, it always assumes that this particular thing is worth doing. This realm of values is quite apart from either pure or applied science and may be referred to as philosophy.

Just as any applied science stands midway between pure science and the realm of philosophy, so does mental hygiene, which is one form of applied science in psychology. It borrows from "pure" psychology such observed facts as that habits are learned in certain definite ways or that certain needs or desires are imperious---they must be satisfied. Then, acting as an applied science, mental hygiene sets about to improve, for example, parent education, or certain institutional arrangements, or educational procedures. These again are done upon the assumption of certain underlying values. I can best indicate what these values are by a fuller statement of what is meant by mental health.

Mental health might be defined in terms of negatives, such as the absence of insanity, crime, and unhappiness. A positive definition, however, is preferable, and the following are offered:

1. The possession of such habits that new or difficult situations can be met with the maximum of efficiency and happiness; that is, flexible, not tyrannical habits.
2. Freedom from the constraint of past habits, so that one may act wisely and intelligently in the face of any situation, rather than in ways in which we have to act, whether wise and intelligent or not.

Mental health is thus seen in terms of freedom versus compulsion. Freedom, as seen here, is not necessarily a good in itself, but is good in that it releases intelligence toward the end of satisfying human wants.

What, then, are the ways in which we are constrained? First, one may refer to inward constraints in which we may be victimized by our own past habits. The home-sick girl at college, the kleptomaniac, and the neurotic child are all illustrations of inability to face a new situation wisely because of being chained to one's past. But, in the second place, we are also constrained outwardly, or by habits of society. How futile it seems for psychiatrists and psychologists to treat individuals, one at a time, when they know that something about our societal arrangements is producing these misfits, by methods of mass production. The single factor, for example, of economic insecurity has chained human beings to more unfortunate habits than ten thousand psychiatrists could remove in a lifetime of effort. We live, as Graham Wallas has said, in the Great Society. Each one of us is dependent upon all the others, and, until our societal arrangements have recognized this fact, and until something like economic security is available to all, there is no possibility of human beings becoming free; for freedom consists in knowing one's limitations, in the possibility of retrieving hostages already given, and in the consequent releasing of intelligence.

Finally, in my opinion, the most important hostages which we

have given are social ones. The freeing of these will release most of our individual constraints. We are bound up in one social fabric. You and I, belonging to favored classes, may think we possess relative freedom, but we are constrained by the very isolation of our position. As long as one individual, one group, or one class remains in the bondage of economic insecurity, none of us is free.

Professor William Burnham has stated the goal of mental hygiene as follows: "a task, a plan, and freedom to carry out the plan." I should like to revise this as follows: "a common task, a plan in which all are needed, and freedom for everyone."

- Theodore Newcomb