

Conclusion

To describe how people change as they grow older is to confuse inevitable and universal genetic unfolding with the relative conditioning of local culture. We do not know and may never know which changes must take place because internally programmed, and which merely depend on the time and place into which one is born. So a description of growth as known in our culture can mislead in grave ways. It can imply that some trends are good just because they happen and look like the work of nature. It can imply that some trends cannot be changed. What is biological is probably good and unchangeable except by slow evolution, but it's most likely that people's biological endowment is very open and that much of the change we see as people grow older is culturally induced. The more general, the more biological; the more specific, the more cultural, for biology governs culture as context does text.

A lot of evidence supports the idea that many changes accepted as necessary growth are cultural and that in some respects it would be better for the culture than for the child to change. Jean Piaget has said, for example, that what he regards as the highest kind of thinking prevails commonly among younger children but very little among adults—the ability to consider any state in a continuum of states as equally valid and yet to return to the point of departure. This defines *open-minded* in a way. Until about school age, children can use either brain hemisphere to process language and to do other things. Some, perhaps many, children seem to be able to see naturally the “auras” around other people (probably just certain bands of the electromagnetic spectrum) until their perception is made to conform. Many lose musical aptitude and other skills associated with the nonverbal half of the brain.

Probably the most dismal evidence of negative growth comes out of school performance itself in the form of a virtual never-failing slump starting around fourth grade, when many children suddenly don't seem to be able to read and do other things well that teachers thought they had mastered. Scores drop, attitudes become negative, and students begin dropping out either mentally or physically. It's about this time—around eight or nine years of age—that the full force of acculturation in and out of the home really hits the child. The reason this can influence growth so negatively sometimes is that culture tries to preserve itself by making everybody perceive and think and act alike, even though this ends by so starving out creativity that it dooms the culture itself.

An overemphasis of the verbal/analytic half of the brain in our own culture is endangering the culture, because it drives out the

integrative, analogical thinking desperately needed to coordinate action within the vast intricacies of both individual and international life in this era of modern technology. Balance is the key, and the grand paradox is that people reason and verbalize better if they stop sometimes in favor of intuition and metaphor.

Although it is necessary to examine the problems egocentricity causes in discoursing, it would be a great mistake to regard egocentricity as just a bad thing. Failure to separate oneself from the object—not being objective—is at bottom the self's oneness with the world. It is a problem at the practical level, because getting and spending and fending and begetting all require making distinctions and then reordering the pieces of the world in some utilitarian way once you've broken it down. Jogging children out of the oneness of the world surely does them a mixed service. If it is true that for survival they simply must learn sooner or later to think and talk in analytic and linear ways, it is also true that every culture has always upheld this global feeling we call egocentricity as the basis of spirituality, and children forced out of it too soon or too far look for it again later through drugs or other ways to release their psyche from the isolating fragmentation of the analytic lesson too well learned.

The final stage of growth, though, is having the best of the mystical world of unity and the practical world of plurality—being able to play the whole abstraction scale with virtuosity and still be able in a moment to fuse self with world, one thing with another. In fact, the abstractive process carries within it the means to regain paradise. Pursuing differentiation and integration far enough leads out the other side, back into the nonverbal world. The more people interrelate the things of experience by one logic or another (including metaphor) the more they are rebuilding the world within.

Abstracting is “converting” matter to mind, a kind of alchemy. The more people at the same time make unconsciousness conscious, the more they identify with the world they are incorporating. In total fulfillment of communication's goal—to remove a differential—the inner and outer worlds equalize. This return to the newborn's unity with people and things is not, of course, mere regression. Consciousness makes the difference. The ego that arose to negotiate between the organism and the world has expanded from a point to an area. In a sense egocentricity is not at all reduced; the secret has been to expand it over the community and then over the cosmos—to overdo it extravagantly so that ego feels identified with all it encompasses by mind.

The highest abstractions cover all time and space and in fact expose time and space as mental blocks. Instead of merely projecting themselves unconsciously into what they see or read, fulfilled