

# FOR AND AGAINST SUMMERHILL

## John Holt

Born in New York in 1923, John Holt started teaching in grade schools at the age of thirty. During the next fourteen years he acquired a thorough firsthand knowledge of how elementary schools operate. He made his opinions on this subject known in two best-selling books, **HOW CHILDREN FAIL** and **HOW CHILDREN LEARN**. He has also written articles for many journals of opinion, such as **HARPERS**, **NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS**, **PARENTS MAGAZINE** and **THE New York Times MAGAZINE**. His most recent book is entitled **THE UNDERACHIEVING SCHOOL**.

He has been a lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. At present, Mr. Holt serves as a visiting lecturer in the Department of Education at the University of California in Berkeley.

How does Summerhill work? What does it do, and how? What is the secret of Neill's art?

For answer, most people fall back on the word **love**. It won't do. Even if it were not widely misunderstood, abused, and exploited, even if we all agreed, as we do not, on what we meant by it, "love" is too simple and vague to be a good or complete explanation. It is no use to tell people that their child's problems will be solved if they will only love him. They think they do already. If they don't, they don't want to admit it, even to themselves.

Moreover, you can't make yourself love someone, feel affection, tenderness, joy in his company, by telling yourself that you ought to. Love in that sense is not to be turned on and off like a faucet. The problem is: what can be learned from Neill that can be applied by anyone, whatever he may feel or think he feels about children?

Over the years, many children have gone to Summerhill who were wholly defeated and demoralized by life, locked in their desperate protective strategies of self-defense and deliberate failure, filled with fear, suspicion, anger, and hatred. I knew one such child myself. Only a year before he went to Summerhill, he seemed not far from a complete breakdown. At Summerhill he got well. Most of the children there-not all, the school has had its failures-get well. They get back their strength, confidence, and courage, and turn to face life and to move out into it, as all healthy children really want to do, instead of running and hiding from it. In a school that does not care much about schoolwork many of

these children, hopeless failures in school after school, begin to do competent and even excellent work, often progressing two, three, and even five times as fast as conventionally good students in conventionally good schools.

How does Neill help such children get well and start living again? Many people will start arguing here about what they call "Permissiveness". The argument is silly and useless. So is the word itself. Like so many pejorative words-"growl words" as a friend of mine calls them- permissiveness sticks a two-valued label on a complicated, multi-valued, even multi-dimensional reality. Black or white. Permissive or not permissive. Permissive of what? Nobody in the world-not even the most fanatic kind of old- fashioned, complex-fearing progressive - permits a child to do everything. And nobody, except those few twisted souls who like to chain a child to a bedpost or lock him in a closet, permits a child to do nothing. Some permit some things others permit others. What A permits, B forbids.

Thus, for example, I like to talk to little children, and to listen to them talk. I take their talk and ideas seriously. I do not think that their view of life or their opinions on it are trivial because they are based on little experience. I like to do what many sneeringly call "getting down to their level"- play games with them, foolish games, rough games, even games where they hit me or call me names, provided only that the spirit is joyous and friendly. I do not demand of them the kind of enlisted - man-to-officer deference that most adults think is their right. But I will not buy a child candy and junk every time we happen to go in a store, and I make this clear to them before we go in. We must take children seriously and treat them courteously and respectfully, but we should not, as most people do, constantly indulge them with money.

Dealing with children, some people draw lines here, others there. All of us draw them differently for different children and different circumstances. The word "permissiveness" cannot possibly describe all the variations and subtleties of these lines. More to the point, it cannot describe the spirit in which these lines are drawn. There are many ways of telling a child that he must go to bed at a certain hour. A may sincerely believe that if the child is not told when to go to bed, his sleep and his health will suffer, and that he will develop bad habits. B may sincerely believe that a child expects, needs, and demands to be told when to go to bed. C may simply sweep a child off to bed at a certain hour because he wants to get him out of the way. D may tell him to go to bed, as he tells him many other things, because he thinks it is good for the child to be made to do what he doesn't want to do. E may tell him to go to bed because he needs to push someone around and his child happens to be the handiest and perhaps the only person he can push around. One parent may say, "This hurts me more than it does you," and mean it; another may say, "This hurts you more than it does me," and enjoy it. These differences make all the difference.

Conversely, one may not tell a child to go to bed for many widely different reasons. A may sincerely believe that if going to bed is not made a field of battle a child will sensibly regulate his own sleep, decide when to go to sleep as he decides when to run or get a drink or sit down. B may want a child to learn by experience the consequences of getting enough sleep, so that eventually, even if not right away, he will be able to manage this part of his life. C may believe that it is bad to make a child go to bed, or do anything else, that he doesn't want to do. D just may not care. E may shrink from a painful battle he is not sure he can win, or that seems more trouble than it is worth. F, fearing he may lose the love of his child, may give him his way as a kind of bribe. Again, these differences make all the difference, and the difference they make varies much from one child to another. Some children are very sensitive to punishment; others not at all. Some children are little affected by

attempts to bribe them, some are insulted and angered some - the only ones properly called "spoiled"-are deeply corrupted.

In any case, to call Neill permissive is not just an oversimplification but a serious mistake. Let me cite an example that is widely, indeed almost always misunderstood-the matter of his rewarding with a gift a child who steals something. When Neill gives a child sixpence for stealing, is he "permitting" him to steal? Nonsense! If Neill meant to "permit" it, didn't care whether a child stole or not he would simply take no notice. But in fact he takes a very particular kind of notice, whose meaning is not for a second lost on the child. The child knows, when Neill gives him the six- pence, that he is not saying, "Sure, stealing is fine, go steal some more." The child knows already that Neill does not steal and does not want stealing around the school. What then does he hear Neill saying with this gift of suspense? He hears him saying, "I know you are not a thief." He is rightly amazed, thinks, "Not a thief! Of course I'm a thief, everyone tells me so, all the time. Besides, I just proved it, by stealing." To these thoughts he hears Neill's silent reply, "No, not a thief. If I thought you were a thief, and would go on stealing indefinitely, I'd be a bloody idiot to give you money every time you did it, wouldn't I?" No way to argue with that; Neill is clearly no idiot. "No, at heart you're not a thief. You may be stealing now, trying to satisfy important needs that you don't know how to satisfy any other way. But there are other ways. I am ready to help you look for them, and I think you will find them."

Among the Father Brown detective stories by G. K. Chesterton - wonderful stories, by the way – there is a particularly moving story called *The Secret of Falmbeau*. In the story a great American detective is discussing crime and criminals with Father Brown and his old friend Flambeau, the long retired and now respectable one-time master criminal and terror in Europe. The American has asked him Father Brown the secret of his success at catching criminals. Father Brown answers that it is simple; he has only to put himself into the mind, the very heart and soul of the criminal, see and feel things as he does, become the criminal himself, to know who the criminal is. The American can't take this, cannot admit that there is a potential criminal in everyone, in himself, angrily dismisses all this as sentimentality. This is too much for Flambeau. He rises to his full, enormous height, tells the American who he is, that the police of the entire world tried without success for years to catch him, that only Father Brown had understood why he stole, and that when he told him why he stole he had stopped stealing for good. A romantic story, perhaps, but there seems to me a truth that Neill has understood.

Like Father Brown, Neill understands the importance of forgiveness and faith, notions that many contemporary thinkers consider old-fashioned and unmeasurable, hence unscientific. Perhaps the recent work of Robert Rosenthal may convince at least some that the behavior we expect of people has a great deal to do with the behavior we are likely to get.

Neill also understands something about Operant conditioning that is overlooked or not understood by many of its practitioners and worshippers. What they call Positive Reinforcement, and what plain English calls encouragement or reward, depends not on the view of the person who gives it but the person who gets it. Human motives are a good deal more complicated than those of rats or pigeons. From outside another person's mind and skin we can only guess, we cannot know what he may sense as reinforcement. Thus a child who for years has stolen repeatedly is quite obviously getting something he thinks he wants, i.e., being re-enforced, by whatever the adults are doing and saying to try to make him stop.

Finally Neill something almost too simple and everyday to be called psychology, which is that if telling a child for years not to steal and punishing him when he does has not made him stop, it is time to try something else.

What is the something else? The six pence's-and not every wrong act is rewarded-are- only a part of it. More important is Neill's way of reacting to offenses and offenders, perhaps better called the natural collisions of wills, interests, and needs in his small close-knit community. He may not always reward, or even approve. He may even get indignant or angry. But whatever he does, he is responding to the act itself, not sitting in judgment on a person. What he tries to deal with is the fact that Tommy has just stolen something. Not that Tommy "is a thief." Also, his response is of the moment, not permanent. He does not label children, does not make a permanent record of their past offenses, and does not pile black marks and demerits on them. The children do not feel that mistakes are indefinitely held against them, don't have to drag their unhappy pasts behind them, feel they have a fresh start each day – and which of us does not need and want that.

Also, his response is personal. Though now and then, as head of the school, he may have to decide that a particular child, being more disturbed or destructive than the school can handle, cannot stay there, most of the time he reacts not as "authority", not as some embodiment of right and virtue, but as Neill. If, as occasionally he must, he speaks sternly or even angrily, he is speaking for himself, not all of humanity. Thus he does not make the child feel that he has been cast out of humanity. In this, how much wiser he is than most of our judges, who often preach little moral lessons at the men they are sending off to prison; probably nothing guarantees so much as those lessons the quickest possible return of those men to crime.

Because Neill's reaction is immediate, personal and authentic, not impersonal, bureaucratic, and assumed, it is instructive. Now and then, as when a child swipes one of his garden tools just when he needs to use it, he may get angry. His anger conveys to children what really is wrong about stealing-that it hurts the person you steal from. It has nothing to do with anything so abstract and foolish, not to say mistaken, as the notion that property and property rights are sacred. What counts is that when you take something from someone you indict on him a time and energy wasting, anxious, painful experience. He hunts frantically for the missing object, can't find it, tries to think where he might have put it, wonders whether he might have left or lost it some- where else, wonders whether someone else might have borrowed it and forgot to tell him, wonders later whether whoever took it will remember to return it, or even means to return if wonders, if it was taken on purpose, which of his enemies or even friends might have done if wonders perhaps whether his friends really are his friends. All this hurts. Moreover, whatever it was he wanted to do, he can't do, because of what is missing. When we steal from people, this is what we do to them. They hate it, and we shouldn't do it. This is what children learn from the quick and natural of people from whom they steal.

Enough has been said about the general meetings at Summerhill (most non-coercive schools have similar meetings) so that I need only note here that they serve, not only as the body that makes most of the laws of the school, but also as a kind of court where disputes may be settled and offences by one person against another dealt with. At the meeting I attended, a small boy "brought up", as the school saying goes, a

bigger boy for bullying him. He told his story, the bigger boy told his, witnesses spoke up, the small boy's story was established as true, and the bigger boy shamefacedly admitted it. What to do? The chairman asked the big boy angrily this had come up before - why he didn't leave the little boy alone. The big boy muttered something about not being able to stand him. Several children said, "Then stay away from him, he doesn't follow you around." Another child pointed out that they had to do more than this to make it less likely that the bullying would happen again. Soon the children hit on a most practical and human solution. They realize with the wisdom of children that punishing the big boy would probably do more harm than good. Instead, they agreed that if the little boy was bullied again, he should have the right to call an instant school meeting, taking precedence over anything else that might be going on. Thus the bigger boy would face, immediately, the community's disapproval of his bullying, plus their additional annoyance at having been diverted by this matter from whatever they had been doing. I don't know how this all came out, but it seems a much wiser way of dealing with the problem than any group of adults would be likely to devise.

One might ask, why any bullying at all in such a community - and from other sources. I have heard that at one time or another bullying has been a problem at the school. The reason is simple enough. Unhappy kids, like unhappy adults, are apt to try to work off their frustration and anger on whatever scapegoats they can find. Also, until very recently and perhaps even now, the ritualized bullying of little kids by big ones was allowed and even encouraged in many British schools. One might also ask, might not the school meeting itself sanction the harassing of an unpopular student, as in the horrifying story in Frank Conroy's autobiography *Stop-Time*, in which he and the other students - at a so-called American school decide by unanimous vote that all of them, each in turn, would punch in the jaw as hard as they could a boy they all disliked. The answer is that if such a thing had ever been proposed at Summerhill, which I doubt, Neill and the adults would never have allowed it.

In any free community, majority rights are not absolute. They must always be limited by some overriding sense of what is fair and just. In any free school worthy of the name, the adults provide this limitation of the right of the majority to do what it pleases. What else in the school helps children to get well? Children there do many things that most adults, in home or at school, will not let them do-swear, be dirty, wear raggedy clothes, break things. At the meeting I went to, a girl of about twelve contentedly sucked her thumb throughout the meeting, taking it out now and then to make some astute comment. Nobody teased her or seemed to take any notice. Is there something intrinsically therapeutic about being able to use four letter words, or go for days without a bath? I doubt it. What seems more important is that these children were freed from the enormous pressure under which they had been living. For many of them, life before Summerhill must have seemed one long battle, most of it against adults whose love or good will they needed and wanted. A hundred times a day they must have had to face the agonizing decision: shall I do what Mother, or Father, or Teacher, or Authority, tells me, or not? What do I stand to gain? What to lose? These are not light calculations. Having to make them day after day must be exhausting to children, as it would be to any of us. They had to spend so much time and energy either doing or not-doing what others told them to do that they had no time and energy for doing things on their own. One way or another they were always reacting to others, giving in or resisting, but in neither case acting independently, autonomously, pursuing their own interests and needs.

At Summerhill they are free of this. They do not have to decide all the time what to do about the people who are trying to force them to do things, because nobody is forcing them. As long as they don't interfere with other children's lives, they can do what they want, or as little as

they want. At last, they have time. Time even to "do nothing"-though in fact this is impossible, nobody alive can "do nothing" awake or asleep our minds are working, usually on things important to us. What then are the children doing who seem to be "doing nothing," and how does it help them? Here I can only guess, drawing on what I can remember of the ways I have used thoughts or dreams or fantasies to overcome or digest or somehow get the better of experiences that had at first got the better of me. I suspect that much of the time they are thinking over their lives, their past, playing it over and over, reliving it, reworking it, until they have robbed it of some of its power to cripple and hurt.

Years ago I heard the psychoanalyst Theodore Reik, give to young lovers, married or otherwise, what seemed a most astonishing piece of advice. Don't, he said, get into the business of talking over your happy memories: of meeting, courtship, love, etc. Don't sit around saying fondly, "Remember that time we..." As long as that memory lives in your subconscious, the experience will keep its magic power and will nourish your love for each other. But if you drag it up into the bright daylight of consciousness and talk, it will begin to fade like an old photograph in the sun, lose its freshness and intensity, become like something seen or read or that happened to someone else. It seemed to follow from this- whether he said it or not I no longer remember- that the way to rob a past experience of its power to hurt is not to try to forget it, but to try to remember it, over and over again.

Do this, and an odd thing happens. At first, remembering the experience, you literally relive it, are right in the middle of it. Then, gradually, you begin to draw away from it, get outside it. Whatever happened to you, you still see and hear, but increasingly as a spectator, as if watching a movie of yourself. At first the movie is vivid and painful; all close ups, and that really is you in the middle of it. But as you play that movie over and over, it becomes less vivid and real, and that person there in the midst of it, having bad things happen to him or making some kind of dreadful fool of himself, is trot the here-and-now living you, but a part you once played, a you that no longer exists.

And as you draw out of and away from that experience, you may begin to do something else, have that character in there play his role differently, avoid his mistake, say or do something other and better than what he did. You begin to reshape the past. We all do this. I think of an example, trivial but typical. Last winter, starting on a fairly complicated series of air trips, I put my ticket into my pocket. When near the airport, too far to turn back, I realized that my tickets were in two envelopes, and that I had left behind the more important of them. I raged at myself for a while, and then, in my fantasy world, I began to replay the scene in my room, as I should have played it. I saw myself carefully looking in the file folder where the other ticket was, taking it out, putting it in my pocket. I saw myself doing a number of things that, had I really done them, would have reminded me to look for that second book of tickets. After a while I was no longer angry at myself, no longer distressed by the experience, able to see it as just another goof-up, ready to go on to whatever life brought next.

What is the use of these mental tricks? I have suggested one: by replaying the experience we get away from it and outside it. Also, by adjusting the past we create as it were a new past or pasts, in which we were more sensible prudent, closer to the kind of person we want to be. These made-up pasts can be a kind of preparation for the future. They are a way, perhaps the only way, to learn from our mistakes. Not only do we prepare ourselves to act better in the future, but to some extent we fool ourselves that we really did act a little better in the past.

We see our real selves, the selves most real to us, not as the person who goofed back there, but as the person who thought- even if too late – of sensible thing to do. So, imagining myself not forgetting instead of forgetting that airline ticket or, as on another occasion, not locking my keys in my car, I am able to get the dunce cap off my head.

It seems very likely that children do some such things. It seems likely, too, that the fantasies by means of which they rework and get control of the past may be much wilder than my own humdrum efforts. Little children in their free dramatic play take all kinds of mythic and animal roles; perhaps they do the same in the privacy of their minds. At any rate, whatever the mechanism may be, the experience of Summerhill and like places has proved that in the human mind and spirit are healing powers comparable to those in the body. If the wounds in our souls are not rubbed raw and torn open each day, many of them will heal. This is what Summerhill makes possible.

It also gives children a chance, and this may too be a part of the healing process, to manage a great deal of their lives, to make decisions and to find out from their living which are better or worse than others, and from so doing begin to feel that they can make decisions, that not all of these will necessarily be bad, that if they are bad they can see this and make changes, that they are smart and capable enough to make some sense of their lives, and don't need indefinitely to depend on the guidance or commands of others. In short, more by what it does than says, Summerhill helps the children there to feel and often for the first time, that they are human beings of some dignity, competence, and worth. Children get well and grow at Summerhill because of the freedom, support, and respect it gives them, and these conditions of freedom, support, and respect are the minimum conditions we must establish in other schools if we want health and growth for the children there. No educational reforms that do not begin here seem to me worthy of much attention, or likely to make any improvements in the lives and learning of our children.

The key word is begin. The worst thing that can happen to any great pioneer of human thought is for his ideas to fall into the hands of disciples and worshippers, who take the living, restless, ever-changing thought of their master and try to carve it into imperishable granite, so that not a word shall ever be lost or changed. The words may remain, but the spirit is soon lost. A friend of mine used to say, "A conservative is a man who worships a dead radical." Nowhere is this more true than in education; one thinks immediately of Maria Montessori and John Dewey, It would be a tragedy if it happens to Neill. The only way to prevent it, to honor Neill, as he deserves, is to try to continue the exploration he started to move on further into the uncharted territory of human freedom, happiness, and growth. We must therefore take Neill's thought, his writing, his work, and Summerhill itself, not as a final step, but as a first one.

**SYLVIA ASHTON WARNER**

**Sylvia Ashton-Warner**, writer and schoolteacher, was born in Strartford, New Zealand. For 17 years, she worked in Maori schools, and her poetic style and vision reflect the very special atmosphere of her country. The publication of her book, **SPINSTER**, made her world famous. In her book, **TEACHER**, published in 1963, she forges a unique approach to the problem of teaching reading.

Her other works include **GREENSTONE, BELL CALL**, and **INCENSE TO IDOLS**.

Dear Mr. Neill: This stiff use of the Mister may suggest a stiff Aunt Mary of a generation unpopular at Summerhill, a generation of children forced to learn to read, made to go to bed, and brought up to respect their elders and betters. If so, it suggests quite rightly, for I am all of that: a tough old-timer redolent of discipline. Yet even were I a young new-timer untouched by the rod, I think I'd still recognize my elders and betters and be relieved to feel respect. So I'll keep to the proper Mister.... "Hi, Neill" would not come well from me.

This is not to mean that I agree with all you say because, as it happens, I disagree with much. But this good space can't be squandered on pedestrian disagreement.

"Books," you say in Summerhill, "art the least important apparatus in a school." All that any child needs, you claim, are the three R's; the rest should be tools and clay and sports and theatre and paint and any amount of freedom.

Moreover, you continue, "Parents are slow to realize how unimportant the learning side of school is. Only pedants claim that learning from books is education."

Along with all this, Mr. Neill, you tell of many a child who couldn't read or wouldn't read for the whole of their time at Summerhill. You tell of a boy called Jim, a poor wee chap who had been boarded out, and who compensated for his inferiority by fantasizing. Ever since he arrived at Summerhill, he'd been impressing the boys. He'd talk of a rich uncle who owned two ocean liners. Jim had convinced a few of the boys of the truth of his story. They then persuaded Jim to write to this uncle and ask that tycoon for a motorboat. With the result that for days after, you saw these deluded youngsters watching the harbor approaches, waiting for a liner that would come towing their motorboat.

Another rich uncle, according to Jim, was giving him a Rolls Royce-boy's size, of course but gasoline-driven. Fortuitously, Jim didn't need a license to drive that car; and his uncle, according to Jim, was railing the car to the local station for Jim's benefit. When you, Mr. Neill, came upon the little group heading for the railway station some four miles away, you mercifully stopped the lads, and Jim was visibly relieved.



How can boys, you ask, be interested in mathematics-or for that matter, reading-when he is expecting a Rolls Royce? To ask him to read at such a time would be a crime, you say. Jim lived in a world of fantasy. To say to him sternly, "Put all this nonsense out of your head about uncles and motorcars. It's all made up, and you know it. You take a reading lesson tomorrow, or I'll know the reason why?"- That would be breaking that boy's world before he had something with which to replace it.

Only where a fantasy has persisted for years does one dare to break it, you continue. It took me maybe a year or so, you say, to break Jim's dream in two. And the way you did it was to encourage him to talk about his fantasy. In nine cases out of ten, a lad will slowly lose interest in his dream world. But until he has lived out his fantasies, he cannot possibly have any interest in reading. That, Mr. Neill, is your stance.

Where you say, Mr. Neill, that the best way was to encourage Jim to talk about his fantasy - that was the place where you came within a foot length of solving your reading problems. But when you maintain that to read during that time of his life would have been a crime, that is the precise place where I would have started to weld something of mine to something of yours: my Key Vocabulary to your freedom.

Like all children, Jim had a mind full of vivid imagery-happy imagery of a motorcar, an uncle, an ocean liner, and a motorboat. Jim was a boy with what you call "a mechanical bent" as most boys of that age are. But there also were deeper unhappy images in Jim's mind, which arose from his boarded out life, which drove him to fantasy in the first place.

No one could have known what the word-symbols, the captions of Jim's mind, would be until Jim himself had revealed them, but these symbols would assuredly have represented the sorrows of his life. Maybe he was hungry; most certainly he was lonely; possibly someone had struck him. And of course, there would have been jealousy of some other child who really belonged to a family. You see, I too, had been boarded out for a time when I was young, and I remember so well that fright was the big thing.

But what you saw in Jim as a flight fantasy to be corrected, I see as riches to have been capitalized on and harnessed. The more powerful the imagery, the more productive that imagery because such fantasy fuels feeling. Far from "breaking the dream" as you skillfully did, why not use what was there?

You might have begun by engaging Jim in relevant conversation. Soon the key words would have surfaced his desires, his fears, his feelings, his ideas, and his dangerous instincts-the thoughts that were the key to his mind: the Key Vocabulary.

The first words would likely have been the happy captions of his obsession: *Rolls Royce*, ocean liner, motorboat, uncle, and many others

related to these. After which would have come the symbols of his former pain, the source of the infection. Why could you not have used these very words for his first reading lesson?

You say, how can a boy have an interest in reading when he's expecting a Rolls Royce? He can if his reading is about Rolls Royce. How can alien words possibly enter a mind already crammed to bulging point with excited imagery? How can one push in any door when there's no standing-room in the chamber? But the words to have taught Jim would not have been alien words imposed from outside, but words and concepts already inside him.

It is all right to ask a child with a normal mind to learn to read; his house is not too full to find room for strangers; he can take reading in his stride. But Jim could have learned to read the words, which already were his own-words, which represented vital thoughts yearning to take on form. If you had written these captions on big easy cards telling Jim what they were, if you had guided his fingers around the shapes of the big easy letters, naming these letters, too; and if you had then asked Jim what the words were, he'd have known them alright. He'd not have to be taught a second time.

He would have learned more than the words themselves; he'd have learned that a written word could be of intense personal importance to him: captions of his Rolls Royce and his ocean liner. He would have even agreed to write these words given the means: either a large piece of paper and a sturdy crayon, or a blackboard and a piece of chalk, or a sharp stick and a cleared piece of ground, or a shell on the sand, or anything else with which he could have delineated those strange marks that to his mind would have connoted ...pictures vivid to his inner eye. He would have written those words compulsively. The only discipline would have been his own: he would have read those words and he would have written them because he wanted to.

Any number of key words would now slip out once the door had been opened. Maybe license, I don't know, but less of the captions of that place where Jim had been boarded out. And if there was a word he could not have learned, that would have been your failing-not his.

Soon Jim would have been ready to combine two words: rich, uncle, new car, my motorboat. Then three: I can drive, or perhaps I was hungry. In time, Jim would have gone on to four: My uncle is rich; I've a Rolls Royce. Those-words would have been supplied by Jim himself, always reading with other girls and boys, sitting together reading each other's work, talking and touching each other.

With the detumescence of the mind and the gradual departure of the people crowding Jim's house, more accommodation would have in time been available for casual visitors in the form of outside words and ideas. It would no longer have been a crime to ask Jim to read. For having made friends with the written word, any time now, you might have seen Jim pick up standard books lying around. He would have become, at this time, a boy who liked reading... an altogether different thing from a boy who merely could read.

A boy with a book is much less lively at bedtime. In fact with the help of what you term "the least important apparatus in a School" there'd be a good bit less noise around at bedtime.

Jack, you relate, was another boy who could not learn to read. Even when he asked for a reading lesson there was some hidden obstruction that kept him from distinguishing between b and d, and g and p.

I think - but I'm not sure that you could have neutralized this obstruction had not you yourself shown a resistance to reading. If a child borrows a book, you observe, and he leaves it out in the rain, "my wife gets angry because books mean much to her." In such a case, you say, "I am personally indifferent, for books have little value for me." On the other hand, you go on, "my wife seems vaguely surprised when I make a fuss about a ruined chisel; for I value tools, while tools mean little to her.

Can it be Mr. Neill that tools are the most important apparatus in a school? Anyway, here we have it in your own words: Books have little value for me. Why?

On another page you write: "I met a girl of fourteen in Copenhagen who spent three free years in Summerhill, and had spoken Perfect English."

I suppose you are at the top of your class in English," I said. "No," she replied, 'I'm at the bottom of my class because I don't know English grammar."

Why not? I wonder. Many of us delight in grammar, Mr. Neill, as much as you delight in your tools and your engineering workshop.

We have found, you remark with puzzled interest, that the boy who cannot or will not read until he is, say fifteen, is always a boy with a mechanical-bent who later becomes a good engineer or electrician. I cannot help sensing a vague relationship here between these mechanical bent boys who will not read - Jim was one, too - and you who were also a mechanical-bent boy for whom now "books have little value."

Anyway, back to Jack, a boy who left school at seventeen still unable to read and who now you report is an expert toolmaker. Jack's own Key Vocabulary at five would have shown - and I don't say might have shown but would have shown twelve years in advance-- that he'd go the mechanical way. Boys like Jack disgorge vocabularies pungently odorous of oil, grease, fumes, and noise: words like truck, racing car, jet

wheels, or more picturesquely ocean liner, motorboat, and Rolls Royce. Anything with mobility. Yet only after Jack left Summerhill did this vocabulary of his crash through under its own power. Which at the least indicates that an early Key Vocabulary would have liquidated the obstruction in the first place. For Jack was a boy who knew freedom. With that extra foot length of the Key vocabulary, he would have been reading as soon as he handled his first tool.

Tom came to Summerhill at the age of five and left at seventeen - I simply love this story-without having in all those years attended a single lesson. He spent much time in the workshop making things. Yet, one night when he was nine, you found him in bed reading David Copperfield. He had taught himself to read.

But only because the freedom you provided, as well as the opportunity for expression, had allowed Tom to approach to within one step of the Key Vocabulary where his imagery finally demanded words. A lovely story. Yet he could have been reading four years earlier.

Then here's another Jack who failed his university exams, you say, because he hated book learning.

Why? I wonder.

But, you add, he turned out in the end to be a successful engineer. I've heard this before, Mr. Neill. Are you a disappointed engineer?

A parent said to you one apprehensive day, "If my son cannot read at twelve, what chance has he of success in life? If he cannot pass college examinations at eighteen, what is there for him but an unskilled job?"

You answered, "I would rather see this school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar."

Humph! So you call a street cleaner a success in life!

I like the part where you were on a collision course with Aunt Mary. "Eleven years old," she blew up, referring to her charge, "and she can't read properly!" I would have said the same myself.

For reading in itself has its own quality of healing, a certain pacifying power when one likes reading. The important thing is that one should not only learn to read but should desire to read. Once a child desires to read, learning itself combusts.

Through your philosophy, Mr. Neill, run veins of Zen Buddhism. Suzuki, himself could have said:

I believe in the child as a good, not an evil being.  
The function of the child is to live his own life  
Not the life his anxious parents think he should live,  
not a life according to the purpose of the  
The absence of fear is the finest thing for a child.

Summerhill is good news. This Neill-Zen spirit of freedom actually authorizing happiness is very good news.

It is communication between kind that vitalizes your General School Meetings in which the children are disciplining themselves for raiding the pantry, or penalizing a bully, or debating contentiously the pros and cons of playing football in the lounge, or working out a plan for getting children to bed. (How often along your pages the age-old problem of bedtime blows up. If anything were needed to prove your sincerity, it would be your endurance at bedtime, the only answer to which I've ever had is an endless supply of books.)

You say that one Weekly General School Meeting is of more value than a week's curriculum of school subjects, that the meetings are an excellent theatre for practicing public speaking, that most of the children speak well and without self-consciousness, and that you have often heard sensible speeches from children who could neither read nor write. With or without approval of each other-*mostly without* I'd say-children have more intuitive knowledge of each other than the most accomplished teacher.

I, too, can record that I have often heard electric poetry from children too young to read or write.

## **Erich Fromm**

Erich Fromm is internationally known as a psychologist and writer. His book, *The Art of Loving* achieved worldwide fame and has been translated into 18 languages. His major works deal with psychological as well as philosophical and current issues faced by men. **ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM, MAN FOR HIMSELF, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RELIGION, BEYOND THE CHAINS OF ILLUSION, MAY MAN**

PREVAIL?, YOU SHALL BE AS GOD, THE REVOLUTION OF HOPE.

Having been granted his doctorate in philosophy at Heidelberg in 1922, he undertook psychiatric training at the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis from which he graduated in 1931.

Dr. Fromm heads the department of psychoanalysis of the medical school of the National University of Mexico, and also holds professorship of psychology at New York University. He has been a guest lecturer at Columbia University, Yale University, The New School for Social Research and in many other halls of learning.

**He wrote a foreword to A. S. Neill's Summerhill - a radical approach to child learning.**

A. S. Neill's book Summerhill has had a remarkable career. In the ten years since its publication, it has become very popular in educational institutions in spite of educational philosophy, which is thoroughly in disagreement with the status quo.

A. S. Neill presented a theory that he believed would make people happier and that would help parents bring up children for whom being more - not having more, nor using more - would be the aim of life. Proof that the existing educational system is wrong headed and harmful has since been amply provided by the campus rebellion an international rebellion involving most countries of Europe and America.

What is the student rebellion all about? The phenomenon is somewhat different within each country. In some, it represents socialist demands, in others a fight for greater student participation in the deliberation and the decision making of the University establishment. In these struggles some groups have rejected violence; in others various degrees of force have been employed. In some cases, institutional method have been attacked, in others particular individuals have been damned. Yet behind all these apparent differences, all the marching, sitting and shouting students have something in common: they are all experiencing a deep hunger for life. They feel that their education is being bureaucratized and that at best they are being sufficiently prepared to enable them to earn a good living. But paramountly, they also feel they are not being offered stimulating intellectual food in large enough portions to enhance their sense of aliveness. These students insist that they do not want to be dead in the midst of plenty; they insist that they do not want to study in institutions which, in their yielding to the vested interest of professors, administrators and governmental forces, pay too little attention to their generation's need for a critical examination of today's conventional wisdom.

The campus rebels, even though sometimes misled through political naivete and lack of realism, and even though sometimes motivated by destructive drives, at least draw attention to the fact that today's processes of higher education are deemed unsatisfactory by a large number of

the young element.

The educational failure of our high schools is even worse. By his very action, each dropout casts a vote against the education he has been receiving. Who would deny that juvenile delinquency is related to the failure: of our educational system to provide stimulation and meaning for our adolescents.

The educational system of course, reflects the social and cultural processes of society as a whole. Unfortunately the last ten years have not brought about any improvement. The war in Vietnam goes on; consumption increases for the affluent; poverty remains or gets worse, both nationally and internationally.

Our economic system is geared to produce men who fit its needs: men who cooperate smoothly, men who want to consume more and more, men whose tastes are standardized, men who can be easily influenced, men whose needs can be anticipated, and men whose needs can be manipulated.

By the very nature of this process, our system also creates men who are anxious men who are bold, men who feel inordinately lonely, men who have few convictions, men who have scant values, and most deplorably, men who have no joy in living. For most individuals today experience little aliveness within themselves. Such men often become destructive and violent because in their unlived life wants to revenge itself on life, by strangling and destroying life in all its manifestations.

It, therefore, would seem rewarding to examine afresh the goals of Summerhill, and to discuss what Summerhill attempts to achieve as against what the existing educational system has actually developed.

What is the root of Neill's system? Is it freedom? What is freedom? Does freedom mean individuality? Does Summerhill connote the absence of deception? Does Neill stand for the absence of authority? The death of conventionality? Self government by children? What?

Many more concepts could be nominated. In searching for a principle from which all these would follow, I have come to conclude that Neill's basic precept is no other than love of life.

Summerhill is an expression of *biophilia*. The practical application of Neill's principles is conducive to create a love of life in the young people whom he guides.

What is this love of life? Do we not all love life? Can there be a particular educational system which is characterized by the love of life?

First of all, love of life--I called it *biophilia* in my book *The Heart of Man* - is not shared by all of us even in its simple biological reference, as is demonstrated by the phenomenon of suicide. Granting that suicide is the consequence of an exceptional, pathological condition, the fact that many persons neither love life, nor respect life, is clear. Some individuals who do not respect life do not kill themselves, but maim and kill others. Even the leaders of the most powerful nations on earth are willing to contemplate global destruction (which, of course, might include the destruction of their own country) as a measure which one-day might "become necessary."

When I speak of love of life, I am not primarily talking about hanging to life, nor am I talking about the biologically rooted wish for physical survival. I speak about a certain quality of living, which we have in mind when we say about someone: "He really loves life." or when we say: "She is very much alive."

The *biophilous* person is attracted by the very process of life, and by growth of every manner. He prefers to construct, rather than to retain. He is capable of wondering. He prefers to seek something new, rather than to merely confirm the old. He loves the sheer adventure of living, for life always implies uncertainty and risk. His approach is functional, rather than mechanical. He sees the whole rather than its parts. He prefers structure to summation. He wants to mold and influence by stimulation, not by force. He wants to examine things - not to cut them apart-to look for the why. He essentially enjoys life, not mere excitement.

Biophilia has its own ethic, its own principle of good and evil. Albert Schweitzer has formulated this principle in its most universal form as: "Reverence for life." In biophilic ethics, good is all that is conducive to growth and unfolding; while evil is all that strangles life, freezes life, and macerates life.

Characteristic expression of biophilic ethics are Spinoza's statements: "Pleasure in itself is not bad but good; contrariwise, pain in itself is bad." and "A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is mediation, not of death, but of life."

One can understand biophilia fully only by comparing its opposite: necrophilia. Necrophilia is the attraction of and the affinity to death, destruction, decay, and sickness. Necrophilia is all that is not alive, the purely mechanical.

The necrophilous person is attracted by all that is against life: he craves for certainty, and hates uncertainty; he hates life which by its own nature is never certain, never predictable, rarely controllable. In order to control life, life must be fragmented, cut into pieces-that is killed.



Death, indeed, is the only certainty in life. The necrophilous person smells death everywhere. Just as Midas transformed everything he touched into gold, so the necrophilous person is fascinated by all that is not alive. He likes to talk about sickness, death, burials, money, gadgets, and punishment. The necrophilous person is attracted by all that does not grow, by everything that is static, by the purely mechanical. He would transform the organic into the inorganic. He approaches life mechanically and bureaucratically, as if all living persons were merely things. He prefers memory to understanding, having to being. He is attracted only to that which he possesses; hence, a threat to his possessions is a threat to his life. And precisely because he is afraid of life which he can not control, he is attracted to all that is mechanical, to gadgets, and to machines which he can control.

It is hardly necessary to stress that contemporary technological civilization encourages this attitude. Our system tends to make people part of the machine, or subparts of the parts-all unified by the self-same program transmitted to every one through the same education, the same radio, the same television, the same magazine.

The question arises: Where are we headed? If we go on losing aliveness, will we not end up as frightened, isolated, unproductive particles, unfit to live and eventually preferring mass suicide to unbearable boredom?

I have talked in some detail about biophilia and necrophilia because I believe that the Summerhill system is rooted in the biophilous principle, that that is why Neill has attracted the interest and enthusiasm of so many people, and why Summerhill is one of the crucial experiments of our time. For Summerhill presents the possibility of a life-oriented rather than a death-oriented culture.

Neill's fundamental goal is to bring up children who are alive, who are inwardly active individuals rather than passive spectators and consumers. Education for him has only one purpose: living. And living has no purpose except-living! To be clever, skilled, brilliant, creative, is all well and good. But these goals should not be primary; they should not be ends in themselves. These goals should not be permitted to control life.

What Neill wants to produce is a good man. A good man is an alive man, a man in tune with life, in tune with other men, in tune with Nature, in tune with the rhythm that pulses through all existence.

This principle of Summerhill is difficult to understand. Technological society has deeply implanted in us the idea that what matters most are purposes; that one lives in order to achieve; that position, skill, prestige, money, and security are the great desiderata.

The critics of Summerhill say, in effect, that living just in order to live, just to enhance the quality of living, lust to develop greater inner

activity--well, that may all be very nice-sort of as a hobby; Is it were--but certainly not acceptable as a prime goal. Living for just the sake of living without having, without any achievement to show for it - that is plainly immoral. Such critics cannot comprehend the Summerhill criterion: not what one is, but who one is.

Yet even many of those who are puzzled by the apparent aimlessness of Summerhill are strongly attracted by the concept often without quite knowing why. I believe the answer lies in the fact that they themselves feel their own lack of aliveness and joy. They are dimly aware of their loneliness and anxiety, and they sense the excitement and wonder of life that shines through Neill and all that he touches.

From the fundamental principle **education for being alive**, a number of other principles follow which are quite logically applied in Summerhill. First and foremost, there is the principle of non-lying, or formulated positively, the utter truthfulness of Neill's relationship to the children. It is, indeed, most unusual that it can be said of any man as it can be of Neill that he never lied to a child (although if one listens to the values which are preached in schools and churches that should be most commonplace).

What is the connection between truth and love of life? Untruth and illusions are necessary only to the extent to which life is not fully lived, is strangled or distorted. As long as the unsatisfactory real conditions of life remain such, they will require illusions in order to be tolerable. Man will lie to himself and will lie to others. Contrariwise, the more man transforms his real existence into one conducive to the enhancement of living, the more he can stand the truth.

Man's strength lies in his capacity to know what is real, in order to change that reality ill accord with his needs. The greater his knowledge, the greater his strength. As Paracelsus said, "He, who knows nothing, loves nothing. He, who can do nothing, understands nothing. He who understands nothing is worthless. But he who understands also loves, notices, sees. The more knowledge is inherent in a thing, the greater the love."

On the other hand, only if a person is very much alive can he stand the full truth; the more unalive and ossified he is, the less able is he to bear the truth. For such a man, truth becomes a veritable menace because truth would force him to revisions, which he is incapable of making. For the person who is alive, the truth is a challenge to him to give up inadequate positions for the sake of those more valid, and challenged to actualize his possibilities.

Any person who reacts primarily with an impulse to use force in order to attain what he wants is a person with little love of life. For him everybody is estranged; every other individual is an "object" something dead. And dead things can be moved - not through persuasion - but only through force. Starting on this premise, he is more or less right.

But what holds true of the dead does not hold true of the alive. First of all, all living substance grows at its own pace. A tree needs a given time to grow, its own good time, just as an infant does. He who would use force to change the rhythm of growth would actually destroy the growing thing. Not only is force harmful to growth but care and knowledge is needed to help growth. One who forgets to water his plants or one who gives them too much water is like the mother who would feed her infant only when he pleases her by his smile. Such a gardener must control either by smothering over attention or by neglect; he would kill what he claims he wants to protect.

Love of life has its own way of producing changes: by understanding, by example; and most of all by changing one's self, rather than by changing everything else except one's self.

The tendency to use violence and force can be rationalized in many ways and usually is - especially by governments who, by definition, enjoy a monopoly on the use of force. One can argue endlessly whether one should use force to save one's life, or freedom, or property, or honor. Such arguments usually get stuck at some fine abstract level; and at that point, no solution can really be found. But the difficulty largely disappears if one ceases to think in terms of casuistic abstract principles, and instead approaches the matter with a total orientation toward life. The life loving person may sometimes use force; he may, or he may not be able to justify his specific act in terms of general principles. But whether one agrees with or disagrees with that particular action, one knows and recognizes that that individual is, by and large, motivated by a deep love and concern for life. On the other hand, the necrophilous person may, under certain circumstances, refrain from using force, and yet we know that he is, by and large, motivated by indifference to life or a hatred of life. He might for instance, passively watch persons being starved to death, because he adheres to a rigid and abstract principle of non-violence. In the question of the use of force, what matters is not so much a single action as the attitude behind that action. If one does not comprehend this, one can easily get into all sorts of silly arguments about the use of force in Neill's system.

If Neill favors not permitting a youngster to interfere with the legitimate interests or activities of others, he will not refrain from using force to remove an intruder bodily from the room. But then, is not any kind of punishment, or even the threat of punishment, a use of force? All such arguments are sophistry and merely serve to becloud the issue. One need not deal with such specious arguments if one understands that the core of the matter lies in ends basic attitude-not in a single isolated act. Neill's life-centered posture is clear for all to see; in it is embedded the root of his principle of no pressure.

The avoidance of force is basic to the principle of freedom for the child. Neill has been criticized for his alleged ultra-permissiveness: any child can do as he pleases without restriction. Nonsense! Those who have criticized Neill in this way have plainly misunderstood him in spite of the fact that he expressed his ideas quite clearly in Summerhill.

Many well-meaning parents misunderstood Neill and tried to imitate what they thought was Neill's concept of freedom. And with very poor results. In fact, so many parents misunderstood Neill that his publisher implored him to write a book in explanation, saying: "You must, for so many American parents Who have read Summerhill feel guilty about the strict way they treated their child, and tell their child that from now on, be is free. The result is usually a spoiled brat for the parents have scant notion of what freedom is." In consequence, Neill wrote "**Freedom - Not License!**" From which the above lines are quoted, in which he included many answers he gave to parents concerned with the problem of freedom.

In general terms, Neill defines license as interfering with another's freedom. Thus license becomes antithetical to freedom. Freedom, on the other hand, implies self control. By self-control, Neill does not refer to the Victorian ideal of repression and virtue but to "the ability to think of other people, to respect the rights of other people." For Neill, this emphasis on respect and consideration are essential elements of freedom and not only its limits. I should like to put the same idea into somewhat different words and to show the connection between freedom and biophilia. I will begin by distinguishing two concepts which today are virtually used interchangeably: responsibility and duty. If we say to a man, it is your duty to pay your taxes, to obey the laws, to take care of your family; we are in effect saying it is your responsibility. But, the two words - duty and responsibility -are really quite different. In fact, in a certain sense they are opposites.

The word **duty** comes from the Latin root **deber**, which means to owe. This original meaning is still alive when we speak of "custom duties," etc. A person who "does his duty" pays what he owes to the state or to society, or to his parents, that is, to the authority which controls him. If he does not do his duty, he is disobedient and deserves to be punished. What his duty is and what the punishments for transgression should be are determined by the self-same authority.

When a person refuses to pay duties imposed upon him by the authorities, he is rebelling not primarily against what he has to pay, but against the method by which his duty has been determined in a narrower or broader sense, he has become a revolutionary. Examples of such rebellion abound in history: refusal to pay the duty on tea was one of the reasons for the American Revolution; refusal to pay the British salt tax was one of the main revolutionary symbols used by Gandhi.

On the other hand, responsibility derives from the Latin root **respondere**, to respond. A human being, who responds to what is in front of him, is a "responsible" person. What does to respond mean? A tree responds to the sun by turning to the light, even if in that process it has to twist itself and grow in an abnormal fashion (abnormal, that is, when measured against the orderly and normal shape it would take had it not to seek for the sun from its peculiar position). A mother responds to a child smile with her own smile. She responds to the child's cry of hunger by feeding him. The infant responds to the mother's face, eyes, voice and touch. A person responds to the joy or sadness of another. One responds to a painting, to a piece of sculpture, or to music or to an interesting idea. In fact, all living acts are responses by which man expresses his feelings. Man is not only motivated by the need to get rid of inner physiological tensions; he is equally motivated by the need to express what he is able to express. As Marx put it: "Passion is man's faculties striving to attain their object." Because I have eyes, I have the need to see; because I have ears, I have the need to hear; because I have a brain, I have a need to think; because I have a heart, I have a need

to feel."

Only the person who is alive can respond; or more correctly, the extent to which a person is alive is the extent to which he responds. To the extent he is unalive, he cannot respond. "Not the dead shall praise thee, Oh Lord, nor they who descend into the shadows:" as the Psalmist expresses it poetically.

From the foregoing a general formulation follows: freedom implies responsibility; responsibility implies the capacity to respond; the capacity to respond implies aliveness.

On the other hand, the necrophilous person-the person with a greatly reduced love of life-cannot react responsibly because he can not respond. The only principle by which he decides is that of duty; that is, obedience to "law and order" In acting according to this principle, he also satisfies his own passion for control and the exercise of power over others. To put it differently: by doing one's duty one may negate one's responsibility.

Today, in a civilization in which everything has become a commodity and everybody has become a total consumer, there are two opposite forces which identify freedom with license. There are the adjusted people who merely consume and are scant alive, and who believe that only if we were ruled by law and order, we could avoid anarchy and licentiousness. And then there are many of the young who believe that freedom means absence of tradition, absence of structure, absence of plan: what is desirable is unstructured spontaneous action. They often believe that the old ideas and values are of little or no rue today, that to know tradition, not to speak of accepting some of it, is in itself an obstacle to freedom. Their error lies in their confusing structure with order. I believe that the word structure applies to living processes, and that the word order applies to mechanical changes.

All life-and all inorganic matter too-implies structure, that is, system. Where structure is destroyed pathology and death set in. Hence where there is "process of life" there must necessarily be structure.

But such structure is radically different from mechanical order. It is through order that life is cut down to fit the demands of those who are afraid of life and are attracted to death.

Today, the crucial danger in an automated, gadget-ridden, consumer culture is that we art: becoming less and less alive, and more and more alienated from each other and from our very selves.

Neill's principles, I grant, are most difficult to translate into practice by any person who does not possess his aliveness and his dramatic imagination. Yet his work confronts each of us with the crucial fact that he is an education for biophilia. In his system, the goals are radically different than they are in a system of education, which tends to transform man into an instrument of achievement, duty, order, and service to the state.

Neill has the courage to show what results if one takes "living" seriously, and stops gilding his alleged aims. Any critique of Neill's work must fall within this purview. Otherwise, such criticism is a mere hitting out against an educational system whose essence one does not comprehend.

## Paul Goodman

**Paul Goodman** is widely recognized, as one of today's most incisive critics of society. Perhaps more than any other single person, Mr. Goodman is responsible for influencing the thinking of today's students. A prolific writer, he has been published in just about every important journal of opinion and is the author of over twenty volumes, which include **GROWING UP ABSURD, LIKE A CONQUERED PROVINCE,** and **COMPULSIVE MISEDUCATION.**

A native New Yorker he graduated from City College and was granted his doctorate by the University of Chicago. He has taught in seven universities and has lectured extensively throughout the country.

In every society, the education of the children is of the first importance. But in all societies, both primitive and highly civilized, until quite recently most education occurred incidentally. Adults did their work and other social tasks. The children were not excluded. The children were paid attention to and learned to be included; they were not "taught"

In most institutions and in most societies *Incidental Education* has been taken for granted. Incidental education takes place in community labor, master-apprentice arrangements, games, plays, sexual initiation, and religious rites.

Generally speaking, this incidental process suits the nature of learning better than direct teaching. The young experience cause and effect rather than pedagogic exercise. Reality is often complex, but every young person can take that reality in his own way, at his own time, according to his own interests and own initiative. Most importantly, he can imitate, identify, be approved, be disapproved, cooperate, or compete without suffering anxiety through being the center of attention.

The archetype of successful incidental education is that of an infant learning to speak, a formidable intellectual achievement that is universally accomplished. We do not know how it is done, but the main conditions seem to be what we have been describing: Activity is going on involving speaking. The infant participates; he is attended to and spoken to; he plays freely with his speech sounds; it is advantageous to him to make himself understood.

Along with incidental education, most societies also maintain institutions specifically devoted to teaching the young, such as identity rites, catechisms, nurses, pedagogues, youth houses, and formal schooling. I think there is a peculiar aspect to what is learned through such means, rather than what is picked up incidentally.

Let me emphasize that it is only in the last century that a majority of the children in industrialized countries have gotten much direct teaching. Only in the past few decades has formal schooling been generally extended into adolescence and further. For example, in the United States in 1900 only six percent of the youngster went through high school, and only one quarter of one percent went through college. Yet now, formal schooling has taken over, well or badly, very much of the more natural incidental education of most other institutions.

This state of affairs may or may not be necessary, but it has had consequences. These institutions, and the adults, who run them, have correspondingly lost touch with the young; and on the other hand, the young do not know the adults who are involved in their chief activities.

Like jails and insane asylums, schools isolate society from its problems, whether in preventing crime, or in curing mental disease, or in bringing up the young. To a remarkable degree, the vital functions of growing up have become hermetically redefined in school terms. Community service means doing homework. Apprenticeship means passing tests for a job in the distant future. Sexual initiation is high school dating. Rites of passage consist in getting a diploma. Crime is breaking the school windows. Rebellion is sitting in on the Dean. In the absence of adult culture, the youth develop a sub-culture.

Usually, there has been a rough distinction between the content of what is learned in incidental education and what is learned in direct pedagogy. Teaching, whether directed by elders, priests, or academics, deals with what is not evident in ordinary affairs; pedagogy aims to teach what is abstract, intangible, or mysterious.

As the center of attention, the learner is under pressure. All education socializes but pedagogy socializes deliberately, instilling the morals and habits, which are the social bonds.

There are two opposite interpretations of why pedagogy seeks to indoctrinate. In my opinion, both interpretations are correct. On the one hand the elders instill an ideology which will support their system of exploitation and the domination of the old over the young and they, the elders, make a special effort to confuse and mystify because their system does not recommend itself to common sense

On the other hand, there is vague but important wisdom that must be passed on, a wisdom which does not appear on the surface and which requires special pointing out and cloistered reflection. The champions of the liberal arts colleges maintain that, one way or another, the young will pick up contemporary know-how and mores, but that the greatness of Mankind-Hippocrates, Beethoven, Enlightenment, Civil Liberties, the Sense of the Tragic-all will lapse without a trace unless scholars work at perpetrating these values. I sympathize with the problem as they state it; but, in fact, I have not heard of any method whatever, scholastic or otherwise, of teaching the humanities without killing them. I remember how at age twelve, browsing in the library, I read *Macbeth* with excitement yet in class I could not understand a word of *Julius Caesar*, and I hated it. I am pretty sure this is a common pattern. The survival of the humanities would seem to depend on random miracles, which are becoming less frequent

Unlike incidental learning, which is natural and inevitable, formal schooling is deliberate intervention and must justify itself. We must ask not only whether such schooling is well done, but is it worth doing. Can it be well done? Is teaching possible at all?

There is a line of critics from Lao-tse and Socrates to Carl Rogers who assert that there is no such thing as teaching either science or virtue; and there is strong evidence that schooling has had little effect on either vocational ability or on citizenship. Donald Hoyt in American College Testing Reports (1985) found that in any profession college grades have had no correlation with life achievement.

At the other extreme, Dr. Skinner and the operant-conditioners claim that they can "instruct" for every kind of performance, and that they can control and shape human behavior much as they can the behavior of animals who have been sealed off from their ordinary environment. But it is disputable whether children are good subjects for such instruction in any society we might envisage.

The main line of educators from Confucius and Aristotle to John Dewey hold that one can teach the child good habits in morals, arts, and sciences through practice. The art is to provide the right tacks at the right moments; and Froebel, Herbert, Steiner, Piaget, etc., have different theories about this. But sociologists like Comte and Marx held that social institutions overwhelmingly determine what is learned-so much so, that it is not worthwhile to be concerned with pedagogy. My bias is that "teaching" is largely a delusion.

In every advanced country, the school system has taken over a vast part of the educational functions of society. The educationists design toys for age two, train for every occupation, train for citizenship, train for sexuality, and explain and promote the humanities.



With trivial exceptions, what we mean by school-curriculum, texts, lessons, scheduled periods marked by bells teachers, examinations, and graded promotion to the next step-was the invention of some Irish monks of the seventh century who thought to bring a bit of Rome to wild shepherds. It has been an amazing success story, probably more important than the Industrial Revolution.

No doubt it was a good thing, at first, for wild shepherds to have to sit still for a couple of hours and pay strict attention to penmanship and spelling. The imposed curriculum was entirely exotic and could only be learnt by rote anyway. Mostly, of course, it was only aspiring clerics who were schooled.

By an historical accident, the same academic method later became the way of teaching the bookish part of some of the learned professions. There is no essential reason why law and medicine are not better learned through apprenticeship but the bookish method was clerical, and therefore scholastic. Perhaps any special education based on abstract principles was part of a system of mysteries, and therefore clerical, and therefore scholastic.

The monkish rule of scheduled hours, texts, and lessons is also not an implausible method-for giving a quick briefing to large number of students who then embark on their real business. Jefferson insisted on universal compulsory schooling for Short Terms in predominantly rural communities, in order that children might be able to read the newspaper and be catechized in libertarian political history. During the following century, in compulsory schools, the children of immigrants were socialized and taught Standard English. The curriculum was the penmanship, the spelling and the arithmetic needed for the business world.

At present, however, the context of schooling is quite different. The old monkish invention of formal schooling is now used as universal social engineering. Society is conceived as a controlled system of personnel and transactions, with various national goals depending on the particular nation. And the schools are the teaching machines for all personnel.

"There is no other way of entry for the young. Teaching aims at psychological preparation in depth. Schooling for one's role, in graded steps, takes up to 20 years and more; it is the chief activity of growing up; any other interest may be interrupted-but not schooling. The motivation for a five-year-olds behavior is thus geared 15 years in the future.

In highly productive technologies like ours, which do not need manpower, the function of long schooling is to keep the useless and obstreperous young away from the delicate social machine. The function of the school is to baby sit the young and police them.

Yet the schools are not good playgrounds or reservations either. The texture of school experience is similar to adult experience. There is

little break between playing with educational toys and watching educational TV or between being in high school and dating or between being in college and being drafted or between being personnel of a corporation and watching NBC. Since the trend has been to eliminate incidental education and deliberately to prepare the young for every aspect of ordinary life through schooling we would expect pedagogy to have become functional, yet radical students complain that today's schooling is ideological through and through. The simplest, and not altogether superficial, explanation of this paradox is that scholastic mystery has transformed adult business. It is society that has become mandarin.

None of this works. Contemporary schooling does not prepare for jobs and professions. For example, evidence compiled by Ivar Berg of Columbia shows that on the job dropouts do as well as high school graduates.

Nor has today's education made for peaceful baby-sitting and policing. Instead of an efficient gearing between the teaching machine and the rest of the social machine, the schools seem to run for their own sake. There is a generation gap. Many youngsters fail; many drop out; others picket.

Predictably, the response of school administrators has been to refine the process; to make the curriculum more relevant, to start schooling earlier, to employ new technologies in teaching, to eliminate friction by admitting students to administrative functions.

But the chief, objection to engineering in education is that it is inefficient. It tries to program too much, to pre-structure syllabi and lesson plans. But human behavior is strong graceful, and discriminating only to the extent that, in concrete situations, it creates its own structures as it goes along. Things can be learned securely, quickly, and naturally only through coping. As John Holt has pointed out, the teacher wants the child to learn the lesson according to the teaching plan; but the child quickly learns how to con the teacher, for getting a passing grade is the child's real problem of the moment.

It has frequently been said that human beings use only a small part- "just two percent"-of their abilities. Some educators therefore propose that much more demanding and intellectual tasks be set at a much earlier age. There is no doubt that most children can think and learn far more than they are challenged to. Yet it is likely that by far the greatest waste of ability occurs because a playful, hunting, sexy, dreamy, combative, passionate, artistic, manipulative destructive, jealous, magnanimous, selfish and disinterested animal is continually thwarted by social organization- and perhaps especially by schooling.

If so the main purpose of pedagogy should be to counteract and delay socialization as long as possible. For our situation is the opposite of the situation in the seventh century. Since the world has become overly scholastic, we must protect the wild shepherds.

Current high thought among schoolmen, for instance those of the National Science Foundation and those of the Harvard School of Education, is that the contemporary syllabus is indeed wasteful and depressing. But they would expand the schools and render the programming more psychological. Since the frontiers of knowledge are changing so rapidly, there is no use in burdening children with data that will be outdated in ten years, or with skills that will soon be better deformed by machines; rather children must learn to learn: their cognitive faculties must be developed; they must be taught the big ideas concepts like the conservation of energy. This is exactly what Robert Hutchins was saying 40 years ago.

Or more daringly, the children must not be taught, but be allowed to discover. They must be encouraged to guess and to brainstorm rather than be tested on the right answers.

In my opinion, in an academic setting, their proposals are never bona fide. As Gregory Bateson has noted with dolphins and trainers, and as John Holt has noticed in middle class schools, learning to learn means picking up the structure of behavior of the teachers, becoming expert in the academic process. In actual practice, the young discoverers are bound to discover what will get them past the College Board examination. Guessers and dreamers are not free to balk and drop out for a semester to brood and let their theories germinate in the dark, as proper geniuses do.

It is a crucial question whether "cognitive faculties" does not mean the syntax of school performance. There is an eccentric passage in an early work of Piaget where he says that children in the playground seem to be using intellectual concepts, e.g. causality, a couple of years earlier than they are "developed" in the classroom, but he sticks to the classroom situation because it allows for his "scientific" observation. Yet this might mean that the formal routine of the classroom has hindered the spontaneous use of the intellect, and that the "concept" which is developed in the classroom is not an act of intellect grasping the world at all, but is a method of adjustment to the classroom, the constricted seats, the schedule, the teacher's expectation, the boring subject-matter to which one must pay attention.

Progressive education is best defined as a series of reactions to a school system that has become rigid. Progressive education aims include what has been repressed; it aims to right the balance. Moreover progressive education is a political movement. Progressive education emerges when the social problem is breaking out. To put it more positively, an old regime is not adequate to cope with new conditions; new energy is needed. The form that progressive education takes in each era is prophetic of the next social revolution.

Rousseau reacted to the artificiality and insincerity of the royal court, and the parasitism, the callous formalism, and the pervasive superstitions of the courtiers. The establishment of his day had simply become incompetent to govern. A generation later, it abdicated.

John Dewey reacted to a genteel culture that was irrelevant in an industrialized society. Dewey reacted to rococo decoration, to Puritanism

that denied animal nature, to censorship, and to rote performance imposed on children. Again, after a generation, (by the end at the New Deal) Dewey's moral vision had largely come to be. In his life-time, most of the program of the Populists and the Labor movement had become law; education and culture (among whites) had become utilitarian and fairly classless; the revolution of Freud and Spock was well advanced; censorship was on its way out; and there was no more applique decoration.

A. S. Neill's Summerhill School, a recent form of progressive education was likewise a reaction against social-engineering. Neill reacted against the trend to 1984 Orwell came to call it, against obedience, authoritarian rules, organizational role-playing instead of being, the destruction wrought by competition and grade-getting. Since going to class is for children in the immutable nature of things, Neill's making of attendance a matter of choice was a transformation of reality; and to the extent that there was authentic self-government at Summerhill and to the extent that small children were indeed given power, the charisma of ah institutions was challenged.

Progressive education has been criticized as a middle-class gimmick. The black community, especially resents being used for "experiments". Poor children, it is claimed need to learn the conventional wisdom so that they can compete for power in the established system. Black parents demand "equality education" and expect their children to wear ties.

In my opinion, this criticism it wrong headed. The scholastic evidence shows that the more experimental the High schools the more successfully its graduates compete in conventional colleges.

Black communities should run their own schools, and they should run them on the model of Summerhill. This has indeed been the case with the sporadic Freedom Schools, which have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Neill.

I don't agree with the theory of *Head Start* that disadvantaged children require special training to prepare them for learning. I find nothing wrong with the development of their intellectual faculties; they have learned to speak and they can make practical syllogisms very nicely if thy need to If they have not learned the patterns by which they can succeed in school, the plausible move is to change the school. But, as Elliott Shapiro has suggested the trouble might be that these children have been pushed too early to take responsibility for themselves and for their little brothers and sisters as well. The trouble is that their real problems have been all too insoluble. It's not that these children can't reason; the fact is that pure reason is of no use to them in their coping with their all too real difficulties.

What these kids need is freedom from pressure to perform. And, of course, they need better food, more quiet, and a less impoverished environment to grow up in - AT THEIR OWN PACE. These things are what the First Street School on the Lower East Side in New York, which was some what modeled on Summerhill, tried to provide.

Nevertheless, we must say that progressive education has been almost a total failure. The societies that have emerged after fulfilling their programs, were not what the visionaries had hoped for. French or American democracy was not-what Rousseau had in mind. Dewey's social conceptions have ended up as technocracy, labor bureaucracy, and suburban conformity. The likelihood is that A. S. Neill's hope, too, will be badly realized. It is not hard to envisage a society in the near future in which self-reliant and happy people will be attendants of a technological infrastructure over which they have no control whatever, and whose purposes do not seem to them to be any of their business. Indeed, Neill describes with near satisfaction such success-stories among his own graduates. Alternately, it is conceivable that an affluent society will support its hippies like Indians on a reservation.

How to prevent these outcomes? Perhaps Neill protects his community a few years too long, both from the oppressive mechanistic world and from adolescent solitude-it is hard to be alone in Summerhill. Moreover, it seems to me that there is something inauthentic in Neill's latitudinarian lack of standards. For example, Beethoven and Rock 'n Roll are considered equivalent (though Neill himself prefers Beethoven). We are not only free organisms but parts of a mankind that historically has made strides with great inspirations and through terrible conflicts. We cannot slough off that accumulation of cultures, however burdensome, without becoming trivial. It seems clear to me that the noisy youth sub-culture of today is not grown-up-which is to the good-but also that it can never become grown-up.

Generally, the young of today have strong feelings for honesty, frankness, loyalty, fairness, affection, freedom and the other virtues of generous natures. They quickly resent the hypocrisy of politicians, administrators, and parents who mouth big abstractions, but who act badly. But the young themselves - like most politicians and administrators and many parents-seem to have forgotten the concrete reality of ideals like magnanimity, compassion, honor, consistency, civil liberty, integrity and justice - ideals which maintain and which recreate Mankind. Naturally, without their ideals and the conflicts they engender, there is no tragedy. Most young persons seem to disbelieve that tragedy exists; they always interpret impasse as timidity, and casuistry as finking out. I may be harsh, but though I am often astonished by their physical courage, I am not often impressed by their moral courage.

My own thinking is that:

- (1) Incidental education (taking part in the ongoing activities of society) should be the chief means of learning.
- (2) Most high schools should be eliminated. Other kinds of youth communities should take over the social functions of the high school.
- (3) College training, generally, should follow- not precede-entry into the professions.

(4) The chief task of educators should be to see that the activities of society provide incidental education. If necessary, government and society should invent new useful activities offering new educational opportunities.

(5) The purpose of elementary pedagogy through age twelve should be to protect and nourish a child's free growth, since both the community and family pressure are too much for a child to withstand.

Let me review the arguments for this program: We must drastically cut back schooling because our extended tutelage is against nature and actually arrests growth.

The effort to channel growing up according to a preconceived curriculum discourages the young and wastes many of the best of our powers to learn and cope.

Schooling does not prepare for real performance; it is largely carried on for its own sake. Only the academically talented, only 10 to 15% according to Conant, thrive in this useless activity without being bored, and without being harmed.

Our system of education isolating as it does the young from the older generation alienates the young.

Yet it makes no sense for many of the brightest and most sensitive of our young to simply drop out or to confront society with hostility. This state of affairs does not lead to social reconstruction. The complicated and confusing conditions of our times require fresh thinking, and therefore, what we need is participation, particularly by the young

Young radicals seem to believe that political change will solve our chief problem. Or that our problems will solve themselves after political change. This is a delusion. Our novel problems of urbanization, technology, and ecology have not heretofore been faced by any political faith. The fact is that the educational systems of other advanced countries are no better than ours.

It has been my Calvinistic and Aristotelian experience that most people cannot organize their lives without productive activity. Of course, this does not necessarily mean paid activity. The professions, the services, industries, arts and sciences are the arenas. Radical politics and doing one's thing are careers for only a very few.

As things are, American society either excludes the young or corrupts the young or exploits the young. I believe we must make the rules of licensing and hiring more realistic, and we must get rid of mandarin requirements. We must design apprenticeship that is not exploitative.

Society desperately needs much work, both intellectual and manual, in urban renewal in ecology, in communications, and in the arts. All these spheres could make use of young people. Many such enterprises are best organized by young people themselves, like the community development and the community action of "Vocations for Social Change." There are also excellent apprenticeships open for the brainy at think-tanks like the Oceanic Institute at Makapuu Point or in the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, both of which are careless about checking diplomas. Our aim should be to multiply the paths of growing up. There should be ample opportunity for a young boy or girl to begin his career again, to cross over from one career to another, to take a moratorium, to travel, or to work on his own. To insure freedom of option, and to insure that the young can maintain and express their critical attitude, adolescents should be guaranteed a living. Giving a young person the present cost of a high school education would provide enough money for a young person to live on.

The advantage of making education less academic has, of course, occurred to many school people. There are a myriad of programs to open the school to the world by: (1) recruiting professionals, artists, gurus, mothers, and dropouts as teachers' aides; and (2) granting academic credit for work-study, for community action, for the writing of novels, for service in mental hospitals, for spending one's junior year abroad, and for other kinds of released time.

Naturally, I am, enthusiastic for this development and I only want it to go the small further step of abolishing the present school establishment, instead of aggrandizing it.

There is also a movement in the United States, as there is in Cuba and China, for adolescent Years to be devoted to public Service. This is fine if the service is neither compulsory nor regimenting.

It is possible for everyone's education to be tailor-made according to his own particular developing interest. Choices along the way will often be ill conceived and wasteful, but such choices will nevertheless express desire and will therefore immediately coincide with reality. Such choices will, therefore, converge to find the right vocation for young person more quickly than through any other method. One's vocation is what one is good at and can do. Vocation is what employs a reasonable amount of one's powers. The use of the full power of a majority of the people would make for a stable society, which would be far more efficient than our own. In such a set-up those who have peculiar excellences are more likely to find their way when they have entry by doing something they can do well, and the proceeding to their more particular interests, by being accepted for what he can do.

Academic schooling, of course, could be chosen by those with academic talents. Obviously, schools would be better off if unencumbered by

sullen uninterested bodies. But the main use of academic teaching should be for those already busy in the sciences and the professions, who need academic courses along the way to acquire further knowledge. Cooper Union in New York City used to fulfill this function very well.

Of course, in such a set-up, employers would themselves provide training. In my opinion, this ancillary schooling would do more than any other single thing to give blacks, rural communities, and other culturally deprived youth a fairer entry and a chance for advancement. As we have seen, there is no correlation on the job between competence and prior schooling.

This leads to another problem. Educationally, schooling on the job is usually superior to academic schooling, but the political and moral consequences of such a system are ambiguous. At present, a youth is hired because of his credentials rather than for his actual skill. This system allows a measure of free-market democracy. However, if he is to be schooled on the job he must be hired essentially for his promise. Such a system can lead to company paternalism like Japanese capitalism. On the other hand, if the young have options and they are allowed to organize and to criticize, on-the-job education is the quickest way to workers' management, which, in my opinion, is the only effective democracy.

University education-liberal arts and the principles of the professions-should be reserved only for adults who already know something, and who have something about which to philosophize. Otherwise, as Plato pointed out, such education is just mere verbalizing.

To provide a protective and life-nourishing environment for children up through age twelve, Summerhill is an adequate model. I think Summerhill can be easily adapted to urban conditions. Probably, an even better model would be the Athenian pedagogue touring the city with his charges; but for this to work out the streets and the working-places of the city will have to be made safer and more available than it is likely they will be. The pre-requisite of city planning is that children be able to use the city; for no city is governable if it does not grow citizens who feel that that city is theirs.

The goal of elementary pedagogy is a very modest one: a small child should be able, under his own steam, to poke interestedly into whatever goes on and he should be able, through observation, through questions, and through practical initiation, to get something out of such poking around. In our society this is what happens at home pretty well up to age four; but after that, such random poking around becomes forbiddingly difficult.

I have often spelled out this program of incidental education, and I have found no takers. Curiously, I get the most respectful if wistful attention at teachers' colleges, even though what I propose is quite impossible under present administration. Teachers know how much they are wasting the children's time, and teachers understand that my proposals are fairly conservative.



However, in a general audience the response is incredulity. Against all evidence, people are convinced that what we are now doing must make sense or we wouldn't be doing it. It does not help if I point out that in dollar and cents it might be cheaper- and it would certainly be more productive-to eliminate most schools and have the community itself provide more of the education. Yet the majority of the general audience is willing to admit that they themselves got very little out of their school years. Occasionally, an old reactionary businessman agrees with me enthusiastically that book learning isn't worth a penny.

Among radical students, my proposals are met by a sullen silence. They want Student Power, and for the most part, they are unwilling to answer whether they are authentically students at all. I think they're brainwashed naturally, it makes no difference to them if they demand "University Reform," or if the University is shut down altogether.

Instead of Student Power, what they should be demanding is (a) a more open entry into society, and (b) that education money should be spent more usefully, and (c) that licensing and hiring should be handled without consideration of irrelevant diplomas; and so forth. Youth Power can make the authentic demand for the right to take part in initiating and deciding the functions of society that concern them, as well as the right to govern their own lives- which are nobody else's business. Bear in mind that I am speaking of youths between age 17 and 25. At all other times in man's history, these individuals would already have found their places in the real world.

End