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## Foreword

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(1960a-e)

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### I.

During the eighteenth century, the ideas of freedom, democracy, and self-determination were proclaimed by progressive thinkers; and by the first half of the 1900's these ideas came to fruition in the field of education. The basic principle of such self-determination was the replacement of authority by freedom, to teach the *child without the use of force* by appealing to his curiosity and spontaneous needs, and thus to get him interested in the world around him. This attitude marked the beginning of progressive education and was an important step in human development.

But the results of this new method were often disappointing. In recent years, an increasing reaction against progressive education has set in. Today, many people believe the theory itself erroneous and that it should be thrown overboard. There is a strong movement afoot for more and more discipline, and even a campaign to permit physical punishment of pupils by public school teachers.

Perhaps the most important factor in this reaction is the remarkable success in teaching achieved in the Soviet Union. There the old-fashioned methods of authoritarianism are applied in full strength; and the results, as far as *knowledge* is concerned, seem to indicate that we had better revert to the old disciplines and forget about the freedom of the child.

Is the idea of education without force wrong? Even if the idea itself is not wrong, how can we explain its relative failure?

I believe the idea of freedom for children was not wrong, but the idea of freedom has almost always been perverted. To discuss this matter clearly we must first understand the nature of freedom; and to do this we must differentiate between *overt authority and anonymous authority*. (A more detailed analysis of the problem of authority can be found in E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Rinehart and Co. Inc., New York, 1941.)

Overt authority is exercised directly and explicitly. The person in authority frankly tells the one who is subject to him, „You must do this. If you do not, certain sanctions will be applied against you.“ Anonymous authority tends to hide that force is being used. Anonymous authority pretends that there is no authority, that all is done with the consent of the individual. While the teacher of the past said to Johnny, „You must do this. If you don't, I'll punish you“; today's teacher says, „I'm sure you'll like to do this.“ Here, the sanction for disobedience is not corporal punishment, but the suffering face of



the parent, or what is worse, conveying the feeling of not being „adjusted,“ of not acting as the crowd acts. Overt authority used physical force; anonymous authority employs psychic manipulation.

The change from the overt authority of the nineteenth century to the anonymous authority of the twentieth was determined by the organizational needs of our modern industrial society. The concentration of capital led to the formation of giant enterprises managed by hierarchically organized bureaucracies. Large conglomerations of workers and clerks work together, each individual a part of a vast organized production machine, which in order to run at all, must run smoothly and without interruption. The individual worker becomes merely a cog in this machine. In such a production organization, the individual is managed and manipulated.

And in the sphere of consumption (in which the individual allegedly expresses his free choice) he is likewise managed and manipulated. Whether it be the consumption of food, clothing, liquor, cigarettes, movies or television programs, a powerful suggestion apparatus is at work with two purposes: first, to constantly increase the individual's appetite for new commodities; and secondly, to direct these appetites into the channels most profitable for industry. Man is transformed into the consumer, the eternal suckling, whose one wish is to consume more and „better“ things.

Our economic system must create men who fit its needs; men who cooperate smoothly; men who *want* to consume more and more. Our system must create men whose tastes are standardized, men who can be easily influenced, men whose needs can be anticipated. Our system needs men who *feel* free and independent but who are nevertheless willing to do what is expected of them, men who will fit into the social machine without friction, who can be guided without force, who can be led without leaders, and who can be directed without any aim except the one to „make good.“ (For a more detailed analysis of the influence of our industrial system on the character structure of the individual, see E. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, Rinehart and Co. Inc., New York, 1955.) It is not that authority has disappeared, nor even that it has lost in strength, but that it has been transformed from the overt authority of force to the anonymous authority of persuasion and suggestion. In other words, in order to be adaptable, modern man is obliged to nourish the illusion that everything is done with his consent, even though such consent be extracted from him by subtle manipulation. His consent is obtained, as it were, behind his back, or behind his consciousness.

The same artifices are employed in progressive education. The child is forced to swallow the pill, but the pill is given a sugar coating. Parents and teachers have confused true non-authoritarian education with *education by means of persuasion and hidden coercion*. Progressive education has been thus debased. It has failed to become what it was intended to be and has never developed as it was meant to.

## II.

A. S. Neill's system is a radical approach to child rearing. In my opinion, his book is of great importance because it represents the *true* principle of education without fear. In Summerhill School authority does not mask a system of manipulation.

Summerhill does not expound a theory; it relates the actual experience of almost 40



years. The author contends that „freedom works.“

The principles underlying Neill's system are presented in this book simply and unequivocally. They are these in summary.

1. Neill maintains a firm faith „in the goodness of the child.“ He believes that the average child is not born a cripple, a coward, or a soulless automaton, but has full potentialities to love life and to be interested in life.

2. The aim of education - in fact the aim of life - is to work joyfully and to find happiness. Happiness, according to Neill, means being interested in life; or as I would put it, responding to life not just with one's brain but with one's whole personality.

3. In education, intellectual development is not enough. Education must be both intellectual and emotional. In modern society we find an increasing separation between intellect and feeling. The experiences of man today are mainly experiences of thought rather than an immediate grasp of what his heart feels, his eyes see, and his ears hear. In fact, this separation between intellect and feeling has led modern man to a near schizoid state of mind in which he has become almost incapable of experiencing anything except in thought.

4. Education must be geared to the psychic needs and capacities of the child. The child is not an altruist. He does not yet love in the sense of the mature love of an adult. It is an error to expect something from a child which he can show only in a hypocritical way. Altruism develops *after* childhood.

5. Discipline, dogmatically imposed, and punishment create fear; and fear creates hostility. This hostility may not be conscious and overt, but it nevertheless paralyzes endeavor and authenticity of feeling. The extensive disciplining of children is harmful and thwarts sound psychic development.

6. *Freedom does not mean license.* This very important principle, emphasized by Neill, is that respect for the individual must be mutual. A teacher does not use force against a child, nor has a child the right to use force against a teacher. A child may not intrude upon an adult just because he is a child, nor may a child use pressure in the many ways in which a child can.

7. Closely related to his principle is the need for true sincerity on the part of the teacher. The author says that never in the 40 years of his work in Summerhill has he lied to a child. Anyone who reads this book will be convinced that this statement, which might sound like boasting, is the simple truth.

8. Healthy human development makes it necessary that a child eventually cut the primary ties which connect him with his father and mother, or with later substitutes in society, and that he become truly independent. He must learn to face the world as an individual. He must learn to find his security not in any symbiotic attachment, but in his capacity to grasp the world intellectually, emotionally, artistically. He must use all his powers to find union with the world, rather than to find security through submission or domination.

9. Guilt feelings primarily have the function of binding the child to authority. Guilt feelings are an impediment to independence; they start a cycle which oscillates constantly between rebellion, repentance, submission, and new rebellion. Guilt, as it is felt by most people in our society, is not primarily a reaction to the voice of conscience, but essentially an awareness of disobedience against authority and fear of reprisal. It does



not matter whether such punishment is physical or a withdrawal of love, or whether one simply is made to feel an outsider. All such guilt feelings create fear; and fear breeds hostility and hypocrisy.

10. Summerhill School does not offer religious education. This, however, does not mean that Summerhill is not concerned with what might be loosely called the basic humanistic values. Neill puts it succinctly: „The battle is not between believers in theology and non-believers in theology; it is between believers in human freedom and believers in the suppression of human freedom.“ The author continues: „Some day a new generation will not accept the obsolete religion and myths of today. When the new religion comes, it will refute the idea of man's being born in sin. A new religion will praise God by making men happy.“

Neill is a critic of present-day society. He emphasizes that the kind of person we develop is a mass-man. „We are living in an insane society“ and „most of our religious practices are sham.“ Quite logically, the author is an internationalist, and holds a firm and uncompromising position that readiness for war is a barbaric atavism of the human race.

Indeed, Neill does not try to educate children to fit well into the existing order, but endeavors to rear children who will become happy human beings, men and women whose values are not to *have* much, not to *use* much, but to *be* much. Neill is a realist; he can see that even though the children he educates will not necessarily be extremely successful in the worldly sense, they will have acquired a sense of genuineness which will effectually prevent their becoming misfits or starving beggars. The author has made a decision between full human development and full market-place success-and he is uncompromisingly honest in the way he pursues the road to his chosen goal.

### III.

Reading this book, I have felt greatly stimulated and encouraged. I hope many other readers will. This is not to say that I agree with every statement the author makes. Certainly most readers will not read this book as if it were the Gospel, and I am sure that the author, least of all, would want this to happen.

I might indicate two of my main reservations. I feel that Neill somewhat underestimates the importance, pleasure, and authenticity of an intellectual in favor of an artistic and emotional grasp of the world. Furthermore, the author is steeped in the assumptions of Freud; and as I see it, he somewhat overestimates the significance of sex, as Freudians tend to do. Yet I retain the impression that the author is a man with such realism, and such a genuine grasp of what goes on in a child, that these criticisms refer more to some of his formulations than to his actual approach to the child.

I stress the word „realism“ because what strikes me most in the author's approach is his capacity to *see*, to discern fact from fiction, not to indulge in the rationalizations and illusions by which most people live, and by which they block authentic experience.

Neill is a man with a kind of courage rare today, the courage to believe in what he sees, and to combine realism with an unshakable faith in reason and love. He maintains an uncompromising reverence for life, and a respect for the individual. He is an experimenter and an observer, not a dogmatist who has an egotistic stake in what he is doing. He mixes education with therapy, but for him therapy is not a separate matter to solve



some special „problems,“ but simply the process of demonstrating to the child that life is there to be grasped, and not to run away from.

It will be clear to the reader that the experiment about which this book reports is necessarily one which cannot be repeated many times in our present-day society. This is so not only because it depends on being carried out by an extraordinary person like Neill, but also because few parents have the courage and independence to care more for their children's happiness than for their „success.“ But this fact by no means diminishes the significance of this book.

Even though no school like Summerhill exists in the United States today, any parent can profit by reading this book. These chapters will challenge him to rethink his own approach to his child. He will find that Neill's way of handling children is quite different from what most people sneeringly brush aside as „permissive.“ Neill's insistence on a certain balance in the child relationship - *freedom without license* - is the kind of thinking that can radically change home attitudes.

The thoughtful parent will be shocked to realize the extent of pressure and power that he is unwittingly using against the child. This book should provide new meanings for the words *love, approval, freedom*.

Neill shows uncompromising respect for life and freedom and a radical negation of the use of force. Children reared by such methods will develop within themselves the qualities of reason, love, integrity, and courage, which are the goals of the Western humanistic tradition.

If it can happen once in Summerhill, it can happen everywhere - *once the people are ready for it*. Indeed there are no problem children as the author says, but only „problem parents“ and a „problem humanity.“ I believe Neill's work is a seed which will germinate. In time, his ideas will become generally recognized in a new society in which man himself and his unfolding are the supreme aim of all social effort.