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CONDUCT, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACCEPTANCE OF NEW VALUES¹

(1945)

WHAT is the nature of the re-educative process? What causes it to "take"? What are the resistances likely to be encountered? The need for re-education arises when an individual or group is out of step with society at large. If the individual has taken to alcoholism, for instance, or has become a criminal, the process of re-education attempts to lead him back to the values and conduct which are in tune with the society in which he lives.

The definition of the purpose of re-education could stop here if society as a whole were always in line with reality. Since this is not the case, we have to add: Re-education is needed also when an individual or group is out of touch with reality. We are dealing with what might be described as a divergence from the norm or from the reality of objective facts. The question which we have to ask in considering the problem is this: What has to happen in the individual in order that he give up the divergence and become reoriented toward a norm, or, as the case may be, toward a closer contact with reality?

THE ORIGIN OF A DIVERGENCE

Social scientists agree that differences in conduct as they exist today among men, white, black, or yellow, are not innate; they are

¹ The material in this chapter was prepared jointly by Dr. Lewin and Mr. Paul Grabbe.

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acquired. Divergences from the social norm are also acquired. Efforts to find an explanation of such divergences in "basic personality differences" have been unrewarding. It is probably correct to formulate the following, more precise hypothesis:

1. *The processes governing the acquisition of the normal and abnormal are fundamentally alike.*

The nature of the processes by which the individual becomes a criminal, for instance, seems to be basically the same as the processes by which the nondiverging individual is led to conduct which is considered honest. What counts is the effect upon the individual of the circumstances of his life, the influence of the group in which he has grown up. The normality of this influence is stressed with reference to the alcoholic and delinquent and holds apparently for many other types of divergences from the social norm: the prostitute, for instance, or even the autocrat.

The same undoubtedly is true of those divergences in which beliefs and conduct run counter to reality. The processes which give rise to them—a super-patriot's belief, for instance, that all "foreigners" are "reds"—are fundamentally the same in nature as those by which this individual acquires a sufficiently realistic view of family and friends to get along in the community. His wrong stereotype about foreigners is a form of social illusion. To understand its origin, let us note a conclusion reached by psychologists in the field of space perception: that the processes responsible for the creation of "inadequate" visual images (illusions) and those which give rise to "adequate" visual images ("reality") are identical in nature.

Experiments dealing with memory and group pressure on the individual show that what exists as "reality" for the individual is, to a high degree, determined by what is socially accepted as reality. This holds even in the field of physical fact: to the South Sea Islander the world may be flat; to the European, it is round. "Reality," therefore, is not an absolute. It differs with the group to which the individual belongs.

This dependence of the individual on the group for a determination of what does and what does not constitute "reality" is less sur-

prising if we remember that the individual's own experience is necessarily limited. In other words, the probability that his judgment will be right is heightened if the individual places greater trust in the experience of the group, whether or not this group experience tallies with his own. This is one reason for the acceptance of the group's judgment, but there is still another reason. In any field of conduct and beliefs, the group exercises strong pressure for compliance on its individual members. We are subject to this pressure in all areas—political, religious, social—including our beliefs of what is true or false, good or bad, right or wrong, real or unreal.

Under these circumstances it is not difficult to understand why the general acceptance of a fact or a belief might be the very cause preventing this belief or fact from ever being questioned.

RE-EDUCATION AS A CHANGE IN CULTURE

If the processes which lead to prejudices and illusions, and those which lead to correct perception and realistic social concepts are essentially the same, then re-education must be a process that is functionally similar to a change in culture. It is a process in which changes of knowledge and beliefs, changes of values and standards, changes of emotional attachments and needs, and changes of everyday conduct occur not piecemeal and independently of each other, but within the framework of the individual's total life in the group.

From this viewpoint, even the re-education of a carpenter who is to become a watchmaker is not merely a matter of teaching the carpenter a set of new watchmaking skills. Before he can become a watchmaker, the carpenter, in addition to the learning of a set of new skills, will have to acquire a new system of habits, standards, and values—the standards and values which characterize the thinking and behavior of watchmakers. At least, this is what he will have to do before he can function successfully as a watchmaker.

Re-education in this sense is equivalent to the process by which the individual, in growing into the culture in which he finds himself, acquires the system of values and the set of facts which later

come to govern his thinking and conduct. Accordingly, it would appear that

2. *The re-educative process has to fulfill a task which is essentially equivalent to a change in culture.*

We can now more easily understand why "informality of education" is stressed as such an important factor in the re-education of the delinquent; why the all-inclusive atmosphere characteristic of life in and with a group like Alcoholics Anonymous is said to be so much more effective in helping the drinker to give up alcohol than the long and exacting routine of specific habit training which the alcoholic has to undergo as a medical patient.

Only by anchoring his own conduct in something as large, substantial, and superindividual as the culture of a group can the individual stabilize his new beliefs sufficiently to keep them immune from the day-by-day fluctuations of moods and influences to which he, as an individual, is subject.

To view re-education as a task of acculturation is, we think, a basic and worth-while insight. However, it is but a frame of reference. To provide for effective re-education, we need additional insight into the dynamics of the process, the specific constellation of forces which have to be dealt with under varying conditions.

INNER CONTRADICTIONS IN RE-EDUCATION

The re-educative process affects the individual in three ways. It changes his *cognitive structure*, the way he sees the physical and social worlds, including all his facts, concepts, beliefs, and expectations. It modifies his *valences and values*, and these embrace both his attractions and aversions to groups and group standards, his feelings in regard to status differences, and his reactions to sources of approval or disapproval. And it affects *motoric action*, involving the degree of the individual's control over his physical and social movements.

If all three of these effects (and the processes which give rise to them) were governed by the same laws, the practical task of re-education would be much simpler. Unfortunately they are not, and the re-educator, in consequence, is confronted with certain con-

traditions. For instance, treatment involving the training of a thumb-sucking child in certain roundabout hand movements, designed to make the child aware of his thumb-sucking and thereby giving him more control over these movements, may set the child apart from other children and undermine his emotional security, the possession of which is a prerequisite for successful re-education.

How these inner contradictions may be avoided is one of the basic problems of re-education. A correct sequence of steps, correct timing, and a correct combination of individual and group treatments are presumably essential. Most important, however, is a thorough understanding by the re-educator of the way in which each of these psychological components—the *cognitive structure*, *valences and values*, and *motoric action*—are affected by any specific step in re-education.

The discussion that follows touches but two of the main problems here involved, one related to a change in cognition, the other, to the acceptance of new values.

CHANGE IN THE COGNITIVE STRUCTURE

The difficulties encountered in efforts to reduce prejudices or otherwise to change the social outlook of the individual have led to a realization that re-education cannot be merely a rational process. We know that lectures or other similarly abstract methods of transmitting knowledge are of little avail in changing his subsequent outlook and conduct. We might be tempted, therefore, to think that what is lacking in these methods is first-hand experience. The sad truth is that even first-hand experience will not necessarily produce the desired result. To understand the reasons, we must examine a number of premises which bear directly on the problem.

3. *Even extensive first-hand experience does not automatically create correct concepts (knowledge).*

For thousands of years man's everyday experience with falling objects did not suffice to bring him to a correct theory of gravity. A sequence of very unusual, man-made experiences, so-called ex-

periments, which grew out of the systematic search for the truth were necessary to bring about a change from less adequate to more adequate concepts. To assume that first-hand experience in the social world would automatically lead to the formation of correct concepts or to the creation of adequate stereotypes seems therefore unjustifiable.

4. *Social action no less than physical action is steered by perception.*

In any situation we cannot help but act according to the field we perceive; and our perception extends to two different aspects of this field. One has to do with facts, the other with values.

If we grasp an object, the movement of our hand is steered by its perceived position in the perceived surroundings. Likewise, our social actions are steered by the position in which we perceive ourselves and others within the total social setting. The basic task of re-education can thus be viewed as one of changing the individual's social perception. Only by this change in social perception can change in the individual's social action be realized.

Let us assume that inadequate information (knowledge) has somehow been replaced by more adequate knowledge. Does this suffice to change our perception? In answering this question, let us again take a lead from the field of physical perception by asking: How can false physical perception, for instance, visual illusions, be rectified?

5. *As a rule, the possession of correct knowledge does not suffice to rectify false perception.*

Our insight into the conditions which determine the correctness or incorrectness of perception is still very limited. It is known that some relation exists between visual perception and knowledge. However, the lines which appear curved in an optical illusion do not straighten out as soon as we "know" that they are straight. Even first-hand experience, the measuring of the distances in question, usually does not eliminate the illusion. As a rule, other types of change, such as the enlarging or the shrinking of the area perceived or a change in the visual frames of references are needed to straighten out the lines.

When we consider resistances to re-education we usually think in terms of emotional obstacles. It is important, however, not to underestimate the difficulties inherent in changing cognition. If we keep in mind that even extensive experience with physical facts does not necessarily lead to correct physical perception, we will be less surprised at the resistances encountered when we attempt to modify inadequate social stereotypes.

French and Marrow tell the story of a forelady's attitude toward older workers. She clings to the conviction that older workers are no good, although she has older workers on her floor whom she considers very efficient. Her prejudices stand in direct opposition to all her personal experience.

This example from industry is well in line with studies on Negro-White relations dealing with the effect of common schooling and with observations on the effect of mingling. They indicate that favorable experiences with members of another group, even if they are frequent, do not necessarily diminish prejudices toward that group.

Only if a psychological linkage is made between the image of specific individuals and the stereotype of a certain group, only when the individuals can be perceived as "typical representatives" of that group, is the experience with individuals likely to affect the stereotype.

6. *Incorrect stereotypes (prejudices) are functionally equivalent to wrong concepts (theories).*

We can infer, for instance, that the social experiences which are needed to change improper stereotypes have to be equivalent to those rare and specific physical experiences which cause a change in our theories and concepts about the physical world. Such experiences cannot be depended on to happen accidentally.

To understand the difficulties in the way of changing conduct, an additional point has to be considered:

7. *Changes in sentiments do not necessarily follow changes in cognitive structure.*

Even if the cognitive structure in regard to a group is modified in an individual, his sentiments toward this group may remain

unchanged. The analysis of an opinion survey on the Negro problem, involving white respondents with varying educational backgrounds, shows that knowledge and sentiment are independent to a marked degree.

The sentiments of the individual toward a group are determined less by his knowledge about that group than by the sentiments prevalent in the social atmosphere which surrounds him. Just as the alcoholic knows that he should not drink—and doesn't want to drink; so the white American soldier who observes a Negro dating a white girl in England may feel that he should not mind—and he might consciously condemn himself for his prejudices. Still he may frequently be helpless in the face of this prejudice since his perception and emotional reaction remain contrary to what he knows they ought to be.

Re-education is frequently in danger of reaching only the official system of values, the level of verbal expression and not of conduct; it may result in merely heightening the discrepancy between the super-ego (the way I ought to feel) and the ego (the way I really feel), and thus give the individual a bad conscience. Such a discrepancy leads to a state of high emotional tension but seldom to correct conduct. It may postpone transgressions but is likely to make transgressions more violent when they occur.

A factor of great importance in bringing about a change in sentiment is the degree to which the individual becomes actively involved in the problem. Lacking this involvement, no objective fact is likely to reach the status of a fact for the individual concerned and therefore influence his social conduct.

The nature of this interdependence becomes somewhat more understandable if one considers the relation between change in perception, acceptance, and group belongingness.

ACCEPTANCE OF NEW VALUES AND GROUP BELONGINGNESS

Since action is ruled by perception, a change in conduct presupposes that new facts and values are perceived. These have to be accepted not merely verbally as an official ideology, but as an

action-ideology, involving that particular, frequently non-conscious, system of values which guides conduct. In other words,

8. *A change in action-ideology, a real acceptance of a changed set of facts and values, a change in the perceived social world—all three are but different expressions of the same process.*

By some, this process may be called a change in the culture of the individual; by others, a change of his super-ego.

It is important to note that re-education will be successful, i.e., lead to permanent change, only if this change in culture is sufficiently complete. If re-education succeeds only to the degree that the individual becomes a marginal man between the old and new system of values, nothing worth while is accomplished.

One of the factors which has been shown to have a very important bearing on the success or failure of the re-educative process is the manner in which the new super-ego is introduced. The simplest solution seems to lie in outright enforcement of the new set of values and beliefs. In this case a new god is introduced who has to fight with the old god, now regarded as a devil. Two points may be made in this connection, illustrating the dilemma facing re-education in regard to the introduction of a new set of values.

a. *Loyalty to the old and hostility to the new values.* An individual who is forcibly moved from his own to another country, with a different culture, is likely to meet the new set of values with hostility. So it is with an individual who is made a subject of re-education against his will. Feeling threatened, he reacts with hostility. This threat is felt all the more keenly if the individual is not voluntarily exposing himself to re-education. A comparison of voluntary and involuntary migration from one culture to another seems to bear out this observation.

One would expect this hostility to be the more pronounced the greater the loyalty of the individual to the old system of values. Accordingly, persons who are more socially inclined, therefore less self-centered, can be expected to offer stronger resistances to re-education, for the very reason that they are more firmly anchored in the old system.

In any event, the re-educative process will normally encounter

hostility. The task of breaking down this hostility becomes a paradox if one considers the relation between acceptance of new values and freedom of choice.

b. *Re-education and freedom of acceptance.* Much stress is laid on the creation, as part of the re-educative process, of an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity. Voluntary attendance, informality of meetings, freedom of expression in voicing grievances, emotional security, and avoidance of pressure, all include this element. Carl Rogers' emphasis on self-decision by the patient stresses the same point for the psychotherapy of the individual.

There seems to be a paradox implied in this insistence on freedom of acceptance, and probably no other aspect of re-education brings more clearly into the open a basic difficulty of the process. Since re-education aims to change the system of values and beliefs of an individual or a group, to change it so as to bring it in line with society at large or with reality, it seems illogical to expect that this change will be made by the subjects themselves. The fact that this change has to be enforced on the individual from outside seems so obvious a necessity that it is often taken for granted. Many people assume that the creation, as part of the re-educative process, of an atmosphere of informality and freedom of choice cannot possibly mean anything else but that the re-educator must be clever enough in manipulating the subjects to have them think that they are running the show. According to such people, an approach of this kind is merely a deception and smoke-screen for what to them is the more honorable, straightforward method of using force.

It may be pointed out, however, that if re-education means the establishment of a new super-ego, it necessarily follows that the objective sought will not be reached so long as the new set of values is not experienced by the individual as something freely chosen. If the individual complies merely from fear of punishment rather than through the dictates of his free will and conscience, the new set of values he is expected to accept does not assume in him the position of super-ego, and his re-education therefore remains unrealized.

From this we may conclude that social perception and freedom of choice are interrelated. Following one's conscience is identical with following the perceived intrinsic requirements of the situation. Only if and when the new set of values is freely accepted, only if it corresponds to one's super-ego, do those changes in social perception occur which, as we have seen, are a prerequisite for a change in conduct and therefore for a lasting effect of re-education.

We can now formulate the dilemma which re-education has to face in this way: How can free acceptance of a new system of values be brought about if the person who is to be educated is, in the nature of things, likely to be hostile to the new values and loyal to the old?

9. *Acceptance of the new set of values and beliefs cannot usually be brought about item by item.*

Methods and procedures which seek to change convictions item by item are of little avail in bringing about the desired change of heart. This is found to be one of the most important experiences for those engaged in the field of re-education. Arguments proceeding logically from one point to another may drive the individual into a corner. But as a rule he will find some way—if necessary a very illogical way—to retain his beliefs. No change of conviction on any specific point can be established in more than an ephemeral way so long as the individual has not given up his hostility to the new set of values as a whole, to the extent of having changed from hostility at least to open-mindedness.

Step-by-step methods *are* very important in re-education. These steps, however, have to be conceived as steps in a gradual change from hostility to friendliness in regard to the new system as a whole rather than as a conversion of the individual one point at a time. Of course, convictions in regard to certain points in the total system may play an important role in the process of conversion. It is, however, important for the over-all planning of re-education not to lose sight of the fact that efforts directed toward bringing about a change from hostility to open-mindedness and to friendliness to the new culture as a whole be given priority

over conversion in regard to any single item or series of items of the re-educative program.

How, then, can acceptance of the new values be established if not by an item-by-item change in conviction?

CREATION OF AN IN-GROUP AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF A NEW VALUE SYSTEM

One of the outstanding means used today for bringing about acceptance in re-education, as discussed above, is the establishment of what is called an "in-group," i.e., a group in which the members feel belongingness. Under these circumstances,

10. *The individual accepts the new system of values and beliefs by accepting belongingness to a group.*

Allport formulates this point as a general principle of teaching people when he says, "It is an axiom that people cannot be taught who feel that they are at the same time being attacked." The normal gap between teacher and student, doctor and patient, social worker and public, can, therefore, be a real obstacle to acceptance of the advocated conduct. In other words, in spite of whatever status differences there might be between them, the teacher and the student have to feel as members of one group in matters involving their sense of values.

The chances for re-education seem to be increased whenever a strong we-feeling is created. The establishment of this feeling that everybody is in the same boat, has gone through the same difficulties, and speaks the same language is stressed as one of the main conditions facilitating the re-education of the alcoholic and the delinquent.

When re-education involves the relinquishment of standards which are contrary to the standards of society at large (as in the case of delinquency, minority prejudices, alcoholism), the feeling of group belongingness seems to be greatly heightened if the members feel free to express openly the very sentiments which are to be dislodged through re-education. This might be viewed as another example of the seeming contradictions inherent in the process of re-education: Expression of prejudices against minori-

ties or the breaking of rules of parliamentary procedures may in themselves be contrary to the desired goal. Yet a feeling of complete freedom and a heightened group identification are frequently more important at a particular stage of re-education than learning not to break specific rules.

This principle of in-grouping makes understandable why complete acceptance of previously rejected facts can be achieved best through the discovery of these facts by the group members themselves. Then, and frequently only then, do the facts become really *their* facts (as against other people's facts). An individual will believe facts he himself has discovered in the same way that he believes in himself or in his group. The importance of this fact-finding process for the group by the group itself has been recently emphasized with reference to re-education in several fields. It can be surmised that the extent to which social research is translated into social action depends on the degree to which those who carry out this action are made a part of the fact-finding on which the action is to be based.

Re-education influences conduct only when the new system of values and beliefs dominates the individual's perception. The acceptance of the new system is linked with the acceptance of a specific group, a particular role, a definite source of authority as new points of reference. It is basic for re-education that this linkage between acceptance of new facts or values and acceptance of certain groups or roles is very intimate and that the second frequently is a prerequisite for the first. This explains the great difficulty of changing beliefs and values in a piecemeal fashion. This linkage is a main factor behind resistance to re-education, but can also be made a powerful means for successful re-education.

PART II. CONFLICTS IN FACE-TO-FACE GROUPS