Paul Goodman and the Reform of Education

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I. *The Angry Middle-Aged Man*

A RECENT ISSUE of *Harper's Magazine* includes a letter from a young college graduate who describes herself as "a rebel against current trends in business toward management and automation." Twice she has been asked to leave jobs with corporations because of her opposition to the official rules and regulations. "I did not like and still do not like to suppress my individuality and uniqueness," she explains, and adds that the heroes of her college generation are Ayn Rand and Paul Goodman.

A new prophet has indeed come out of the academic wilderness crying his message of judgment and salvation. A first impression may suggest that Goodman is a new H. L. Mencken without the Menckeneze. He also lacks Mencken's superb control of his instrument, for Goodman writes carelessly and is without the unfailing sense of the ridiculous which protected Mencken from illusions. Mencken always knew when he was acting the fool and this is a kind of self-knowledge Goodman might use to advantage.

Perhaps Goodman's role, however, is closer to the one played by that contemporary of Mencken most unlike him, Upton Sinclair. To bracket H. L. Mencken and Upton Sinclair is to attain a rather advanced level of absurdity, and yet there is a certain appropriateness in this instance. For Paul Goodman may be said to be attempting to play a Mencken-like role and actually turning out to be another Upton Sinclair.

The line between social satire and muckraking is the distinction between an expression of contempt mixed with sardonic enjoyment of the absurdities of the social scene and exposure for the sake of reform. At one place, in an exceptional moment of realistic self-awareness, Mr. Goodman does indeed see himself in the latter role. Muckraking, he says, "has become the protest of Angry Young Men. My own tone in this book sounds like an Angry Middle-Aged Man, disappointed but not resigned."[1]

This Angry Middle-Aged Man is a disturber of the peace of the Establishment. In the first forty pages of *Growing Up Absurd* we find him to be against the organized system of semimonopolies and their respective rat races, particularly those of government, business, and education; personnel practices; movies, TV, the Book-of the-Month Club, and the Luce publications; the oneupmanship of the typical junior executive; university faculties who are safe to their businessmen trustees or politically appointed regents; Dr. James Conant; the President of Merck and Company; vocational guidance; the waste of humanity; public officials; built-in obsolescence in automobiles; the "sole prerogative" clause of union contracts; timid school supervisors, bigoted clerics, and ignorant school boards; such spurious educational aims as baby-sitting and the production of physicists; reactionaries, liberals, and demented warriors whose demands mangle the academic curriculum; careers of salesmanship, entertainment, business management, promotion, and advertising; the baboons running the TV networks that put on the phony contests; boondoggling in tail fins; the $64,000 Question; the busy hum of Madison Avenue; tax-dodge Foundations; business lunches, expense accounts, and fringe benefits; comic categories of occupations in the building trades; extra stagehands and musicians in the theater; and sex suppression in the schools.

Mr. Goodman's anger recedes temporarily as he contemplates such positive values as excellence, manliness, and "true human nature." He is for J. K. Galbraith's "social balance"; an environment which meets the needs of the growing boy, youth, and young man until he can better choose and make his own environment. He wants more man's work, honest speech, opportunities to be useful, ingenuous patriotism, and animal ardor. He would have us take people more seriously; he is in favor of uncorrupted fine arts and genuine science; he thinks we need religious convictions of Justification and Vocation and a sense that there is a Creator. He favors racial integration and sexual revolution, with emotional release and sexual expression in children. He wants more useful work which contributes to subsistence, such as the production of food, clothing, and buildings; and he wishes there were more teachers interested in children.

The key to Paul Goodman's occasionally idiosyncratic pattern of likes and dislikes appears to be his profound antipathy to any form of organized power. He is an anarchist of pure essence but he is not, as sometimes described, a syndicalist. The only traces of syndicalism are imaginative rather than active.

There is a good bit of sympathy among right-thinking people for most of the things Paul Goodman approves and rather more resentment perhaps than we realize against many of the things he attacks. He articulates attitudes shared inarticulately by people who have learned to read and are concerned about the current state of our society. In their more human moments most people dislike and distrust organized power, particularly when that power is exercised by other people. Mr. Goodman has a wholesome enthusiasm for the right things and a prophet's zeal and conviction of righteousness in his battles against sin. But the human tragedy, which includes the tragedy of falling short of the Goodman standards, obstructs his view of the human comedy.

II. *Moralists, Moralizers, and Reformers*

H. L. MENCKEN was a moralist with a mastery of the moralist's instrument of satire. But what was of greater importance, he understood that a moralist's social criticism must be entirely negative. There is no trace in Mencken of any program for the improvement of society except the one enterprise he so hugely enjoyed, the exposure of boobs and phonies.

Paul Goodman is most effective in his attacks upon organized stupidity and institutional asininities. But he pushes his role as moralist beyond its proper limits and proposes prescriptions for the ills he has exposed. What begins as moral becomes moralistic.

As did Mencken in his day, so today Paul Goodman rejects nearly all that is characteristic of contemporary American society. This makes doubly difficult his attempts to prescribe for its ills; the rejection is so complete there is nothing left upon which to build alternatives. The same would have been true of Mencken had he been interested in proposing remedies, but Mencken wisely refrained from diluting the acid.

What Goodman's proposals really add up to is that we go back and start over. As one reviewer comments, Goodman would cut down to human size "this monster of an industrial-governmental complex" and substitute for it "a self-redeeming initiative on simple neighborhood terms."[2] Here is spelled out the impotency of the anarchist's approach, its lack of realism concerning the necessary conditions of life in society and its utter emptiness of positive content. Goodman simply by-passes the actual problems of our industrial society and proposes to treat the symptoms in terms of personal reactions. Andrew Kopkind calls this "the politics of avoiding politics."[3]

An illustration of Goodman's alienation from reality is his proposal in *The Community of Scholars* for the reform of our colleges and universities. He suggests that the faculties simply walk out of these institutions and withdraw to places where they can teach and study without interference from "*the external control, administration, bureaucratic machinery, and other excrescences that have swamped our communities of scholars.*"[4] What the writer fails to realize is that a system of higher education which is driving constantly for its own expansion must have elaborate administrative machinery. Whatever absurdities and abuses this generates, and we all know there are many, the fact is that the alternative today would be the limitation of higher education to a privileged class. However we may regret the fact, it is still the case that bureaucracy and administrative crudities are growing pains of dynamic institutions in a society of mainly quantitative norms. As long as expansion is the prime concern the norms will remain quantitative.

Harold Taylor, who has done as much innovating in college administration as any President, points out that the irony of Goodman's proposal "lies in the fact that as soon as he presents it in his book he becomes involved with administrative detail and must deal with factual things like drawing up a budget, arranging for the use of buildings, and coping with the problem of recruiting a suitable faculty."[5] Harold Taylor should know.

Running through all of Goodman's discussions of education is a concern so strongly biased toward the personal emotional problems of both teachers and students that he misses most of what is central to education itself, the discipline of learning and the growth of knowledge and understanding. He would turn education into therapy; and as one who sets out to remake society, he cannot turn curious people loose to inquire into the objects that intrigue them. Those people have to be processed first so they will not get the wrong answers.

The roles of critic and reformer are incompatible. A critic needs to be skeptical, cynical, always suspicious of appearances, and open to the object. A reformer has to be gullible and capable of a high degree of self-bemusement; he must see facts through special lenses which bend the picture to his demands. If he is to persuade others to support his program he must first be his own devoted convert. The tragedy of Paul Goodman is that he has the skills of a critic but the temperament of a reformer.

By temperament reformers are enemies of order. Although the word itself, *reform*, suggests the re-establishment of an old pattern or the construction of a new one, in either case there is a fatal discontinuity. Reform does not merely expose the ills of the actual but proposes to cure them by destroying the affected parts. Once you destroy the actual, however, you have little left with which to build anything else. A reformer's positive proposals are usually vague and likely to be but disguised negations.

The abolitionists of a century ago, for example, had no program for emancipated Negroes except emancipation itself plus some vague notions of education, vocational training, and the bestowal of political power upon the freed. They grimly imposed their own improvisations upon the remnants of a society wrecked in its economy and maimed in spirit. But the people of that society who had survived were still there and their presence, the brute fact of their presence, still throws its shadows upon the South. The principle that you cannot indict a whole people needs to be broadened into the principle that you cannot absorb individual persons into an abstraction, no matter how worthy and noble are the sentiments aroused by the words which proclaim the abstraction.

Cynicism concerning reform need not extend to skepticism about change. The great conservative principle is continuity. It is the only position that does not implicitly deny the fact of time. Conservatives may sometimes seem slow to recognize the need for change but this may be because they believe that order, even order with faults, is better than disorder. At least we know what we have. By preserving a present order while changes are introduced a new condition can be obtained in steps susceptible to control.

To say, however, that programs of social change are futile or dangerous is not so much a cynical expression as a realistic recognition of how social changes come about. The roots of all human achievement are in the past and anything new, if it is to succeed, must have an effective continuity with what already exists. To destroy present patterns of life and action is to wipe out the very basis of improvement.

Effective social change has its roots in social criticism, and effective criticism requires sensitivity and response to subtleties and nuances the ordinary person overlooks. It arises out of broadened awareness. Reformers, however, have to wear blinders. A reformer is always exposed to the danger of seeing the other side. His involvement is emotional rather than intellectual and he has to protect his emotions from his intellect. It is this single-minded passion that makes reformers dangerous; they are constantly exposed to the danger of being wrong and have blocked the only equipment they have to recognize the danger signs.

Fruitful change is not so simple as the mere substitution of something new for the old. It requires rather an adaptation, under the guidance of sensitive criticism, of what is already there. Successful reform, except by accident, would require us to see the future all at once. Reformers attempt to accomplish this by creating that future. But no matter what they may think, they are not God and creation *ex nihilo* is not within their power. Existing institutions are products of long growth; they are not *ad hoc* improvisations. And existing institutions are the indispensable means for any fruitful change. There are no panaceas. There is no escape from the particular situation into a land of dreams where we can dispose of contrary facts by forgetting them.

Mr. Goodman welcomes and applauds all signs that young people are rejecting the Great Society and refusing to follow patterns set by the Establishment. His criticism of the cheapness and banalities of those powers is pointed and scathing and much of it is just. But what he overlooks is the fact that the same society which spawns these obscenities also produces reactions against them, including his own. Insofar as he advocates a break with the "system" he strikes at the roots of dissent from it.

Mr. Goodman also overemphasizes the influence of many of the power structures he attacks. The fact is that the "system" does not exist as such, as a monolithic and centralized order. Our society produces out of itself its own resistence against centralization. Its life is one of tensions and conflicts; its genius has been in devising ways to confine these within the limits of a legal structure designed to guarantee the preservation of conflict and rivalry. Its greatest enemy is the drive toward uniformity, a fact which Goodman often seems to recognize. But uniformity is the goal of mass society and this is a relationship he misses.

III. *The New Class Structure*

Mr. Goodman finds the present class structure of our society to consist of the Organized System, the Poor, and the Independents. Under the Organized System he distinguishes three "statuses": Workers, Organization Men, and Managers. The Poor are the victims of the Organization and the Independents are those who have escaped its snares. Organization Men and Managers are no more free than Workers; all of them are caught in the System.

This provides Mr. Goodman with a foundation for his more detailed sociological analyses and moralisms. It is possible, however, that a different analysis would be more relevant to the problems of education with which he is so occupied. There is a new stratification of our society rapidly developing, a class system based on age groups. The age classes may be identified as the Young, the Active Adults, and the Elderly. The novelty of this emerging social pattern is in the increasingly rigid separation of the three classes.

The principal cause of the separation of the Young from the other age groups is the drive toward uniform universal education, and the Elderly have been isolated as a consequence of the institutionalizing of the economy. Universal education is rapidly eliminating the influence of parents upon their children, and may even eliminate the family itself. The institutional framework of economic production and distribution involves an entirely impersonal management of persons and is removing from the productive life of society more and more of those who are beyond the accepted optimum age range. Our particular concern here, however, is with the isolation of youth and the relation of this to the educational program.

IV. *Mass Society vs. The Family*

Mr. Goodman fails to reckon with the effects upon the family of our system of public education. The fact is that uniform universal education substitutes the community age-group for the family as the source of values to which children respond. One consequence is a radical discontinuity of value standards of different generations. There is also an intensification of the "natural" friction between those who instruct and those who are instructed. In an adult-oriented society children respect and accept standards they themselves do not understood or appreciate; they are able to do this because they value the approval of adults. In a society in which age groups are relatively separate, control by adults tends to depend mainly upon enforcement. But since no system of order can last long unless those who are subject to its ordinary procedures accept it, the result has been to make the system of education primarily responsive to those to whom the rules apply. This, of course, is the essence of a democratic society, but democratic societies hitherto have been under the control of adults. Whatever may be the limitations and faults of adults, they still are the ones who have the advantages of whatever preparation is available for the exercise of responsibility.

As a social institution the family is essentially authoritarian and so there is a basic tension in our society between family and school. Even a "democratic" family has its democracy imposed upon it. Either it is by the decision of the parents that children are brought into the processes of decision-making, or else the family disintegrates into a scene of conflicts between divergent wills or a collection of individuals whose only relation to each other consists in the fact that they have a common dwelling place.

It would seem quite obvious that if a family is to operate successfully it must have some degree of insulation from the outside world. To the extent that individual members are drawn into close associations outside the family, associations with those of different attitudes and different values, the family itself is weakened. This is the process by which mass societies are created. But individuals who are not in intimate association with each other, living in the same house or apartment, sharing most of their meals, seeing each other in all sorts of situations in which the person is not on guard to present a certain appearance to others, cannot enter into genuinely personal relationships with each other, relationships which involve the whole person. People can know each other as persons and relate to each other as persons only insofar as they are open to each other, express themselves spontaneously and without being on guard, and expose themselves in attitude and emotion. These relations are difficult to preserve in a mass society.

It is interesting to note that many of the attempts in the past to replace the family by some broader kind of association took the form of separated communities. In our own society it is the school which is displacing the family. More and more of a child's time and interest is being absorbed by the school program. The personal contacts which mean the most to him he finds in the school situations. But these are superficial. Those of us who are older can remember among such relationships many which seemed at the time to constitute the very center of our lives. All of our activities revolved about them. But it is instructive to recall how really trivial these were, and how quickly we lost all contact with those with whom we supposed ourselves to be on such close personal terms. A college class reunion becomes a rather pathetic affair after the first moments of greeting and exchange of information about families and jobs. The only things the classmates have in common are their memories of their college days, and there is not much really to be said about those memories any longer.

A consequence of the movement in the direction of mass society is depersonalization. Individuals become role players, we deal with them and think of them not for themselves but as functions of other things. To talk in general terms about personal relationships between teacher and student, between employer and employee, among the people who live in a neighborhood is simply nonsense.

If people are to live together on a genuinely personal level they must live under conditions in which the outside world does not replace or even color substantially their intimate relations with each other. This means that a family can exist and remain in a healthful state only in a community composed of families of similar cultural, educational, and economic standards.

The family is not an economic unit; the family is not a cultural unit; the family does not provide its own education. For all of these things a family depends upon its community and upon those things which have been transmitted into the present from the past, consequently it needs to be in a community of other families of similar attitudes, values, and aspirations. This is necessary if the external relationships it must maintain are not to be disruptive of its own life and spirit.

V. *The Power Structure of Mass Society*

ALTHOUGH OUR society traditionally has considered itself to be family structured, this has been the case only in part. The growth of cities always creates out of the poorer class a mass population. Nor is this true only of modern cities; Republican Rome and Elizabethan London are dramatic examples from the past. The important difference is that today the emergence of democracy has given enormous potential political influence to the masses. Political power is moving from the control by those who have the skills and character to manage the community for the public interest into the hands of those whose main concern is what they can get from the community. It is true that the first group did not always, by any means, live up to their responsibilities. But usually their failures were recognized to be failures and violations of trust. Mass power assumes self-seeking to be the norm rather than a deviation from it.

In a society with a family-structured governing class political power follows economic power; in a mass society, in which human units are interchangeable, economic power follows political power. The masses acquire political power by the extension of the ballot and education. Political leadership and organizational skill emerge with the education of the poor. The individuals who benefit from that education no longer move almost automatically into another class; many of them become the leaders of mass power organizations. The abilities these new leaders develop are not those of production or professional service but rather those of psychological and forensic manipulation.

In a society with a family structure political differences do not ordinarily involve basic issues. Agreements are much more important than differences. Political rivalries are matters of organizational loyalties, family networks, and sectional and economic interests. As class gives way to mass the group structure of a community changes. Persons become members of a public. A man's politics tend to follow the policies adopted by the controlling group of his labor union, his business or professional association, or the city machine. Political power is created by tacit or explicit agreements among groups. The further this goes the more remote are the decision-making acts from individual mass men and the more impersonal is the relation of those men to the governing process.

Our own society has gone far in this direction, probably beyond the point of no return. Government absorbs a huge proportion of the wealth created by industry and distributes this to those who do not produce it. The primary concern in all this is whether the future will be bread (or cake) and circuses or will belong to a mass society not merely tolerant of differences in skill and ability but one which fosters and encourages individual excellence and originality. The issue will likely be resolved in accordance with the quality of the educational system we develop in the next few years.

The serious weakness of Paul Goodman's educational proposals is his failure to see the inescapable consequences of our actual situation and the need to fit the program to the material. In a sense Mr. Goodman is a reactionary, in the sense that he wants simply to extinguish the present and go back to an earlier world. Like all reactionaries, he is also a romantic, for it is of the essence of romanticism to suppose that the limits of time, and of the time, can be overcome.

VI. *Education or Therapy?*

LIKE MOST educationists Paul Goodman sees the problems of education as problems primarily of method rather than of substance. So method tends to become its own end. But whenever we try to deal with people as persons methodological absolutes are out of place. Method and rule belong to the world of impersonal detail and to apply them to persons is to treat persons as if they were things.

Our educational system does not need primarily to be made over in terms of new methods and organization. It needs rather a more intelligent and flexible use of the methods and organizations which have come out of generations of experience. Adaptation of the present system to new needs will lead to new methods and to many specific revisions of institutional procedures. But such novelties are not what we start with; they are what we devise as we need them in order to make the institution itself more effective.

Reformers always want to start over, but the trouble is that we always have to begin with what we already have. The supposed new starts which reformers make when they take control are new ways of dealing with the past. But the past is gone and before us lies a future unknown and unexplored except insofar as that future is molded by presently existing institutions and patterns of life. Our only hope lies in the flexibility of our institutional and cultural tools. Reformers make the mistake of turning their reforms into absolutes and thus they open the prospect of always having to reform the reforms. But our society does not have to be treated as a stagnant pool with the only remedy being a continuing round of emptying and refilling with fresh water. If there are stagnant pools in our society they need to be linked again with the living stream of history which is fed from fresh springs and in its continuous movement constantly renews and purifies itself.

The question of educational content Goodman dismisses by waving in our faces an empty abstraction. "There *is* only one curriculum, no matter what the method of education: what is basic and universal in human experience and practice, and the underlying structure of culture."[6] But what is "basic and universal in human experience and practice, the underlying structure of culture," cannot be presented or grasped as such. It has to be got in some one or some few languages, and it has to be got in terms of the tradition of the learner's own community, the face-to-face community in which he knows other people and they know him as persons. Since many of our youth are not in such a community they have no access to what is "basic and universal." The remedy we are trying out in some places is to create a community in the school. But that community is vacuous insofar as its members do not come out of a common background. Today's pressing problems in our schools are the results of the decay of family and of family-centered communities.

Mr. Goodman exposes with dramatic force this pressing educational predicament. Here he is at his best, for here he gets away from empty abstractions and gives us real people. He shows how we are bringing into our school systems an increasing number of youngsters who are emotionally stunted and alienated from the world of the school. They are slum-spawned creatures of the humanoid masses which exist within our urban and rural social ghettos. Those masses contribute little but trouble and the responsible members of the communities which contain them seem utterly incapable of devising means of control, within the limits of a self-governing society, to apply to them. The relationships these masses have to the processes of government are mainly those of passive submission, economic dependence, and rebellion against the forces of order. The human waste of such a way of life is appalling; the individual suffering and hopelessness and the stunting of human potential are enough to make strong men weep. But feeling itself provides no remedies although it may spur intelligence to greater efforts.

Urban mass populations have created problems for education which the system itself seems unable to handle. Its present techniques are inadequate, for they developed in a society of family-structured neighborhoods in which children went to school already prepared for the school program. In mass areas children are not prepared for what the schools ordinarily offer, and this requires the development of new approaches to teaching. In addition, all the usual and unusual difficulties are intensified by the sheer weight of numbers.

Mr. Goodman properly and effectively reminds us that many children in the elementary and secondary schools of the mass areas and other "deprived" or "underprivileged" sections, to use current jargon, have acute problems of motivation. These children lack the humanizing influences so necessary during the early years, the physical affection and expressions of interest which provide the substance of self-awareness and self-development. We are now coming to recognize this problem, in our "Head Start" programs and in special kindergarten and nursery schools. But these are inadequate in scope and of course such devices will never replace what children are denied in being deprived of family nurture. The best that can be hoped for, perhaps, is some degree of salvage. In the crowded conventional schools of the slums, however, teachers are kept so busy operating the custodial machinery they have little opportunity either to teach or to provide emotional support.

Mr. Goodman's remedy for the dethronement of teaching is not to return it to its proper place but to replace it with therapy. This is his answer to the problem of motivation. He wants student-teacher relations to be in terms of the students' "personal" problems and emotional needs. "At its best . . . teaching-and-learning is erotic," he says, and offers as an explanation of the lack of good teaching that it "always threatens to seem, or to become, sexual; and in America this is a very big deal."[7]

Generalizations about even the culturally deprived are dangerous. We never can be sure about what goes on in human relations behind the doors in even the least prepossessing spots of urban slum or rural blight. Teaching in such areas certainly must be more variable in technique and approach than where children come into school out of backgrounds of personal warmth and love. But one of the variations should be a readiness to abandon therapy with pupils who are ready to learn and to expose them to the intellectual disciplines of the subject matter.

In any event, the solution of our educational problems will not come from general prescriptions, particularly from those which require basic personality reconstruction of teachers and pupils alike. There are not enough people in our population capable of doing the things Mr. Goodman would have teachers do, certainly not enough to staff our schools. Even if there were, the services of such people would be in such demand elsewhere that only a drastic change of our economy could attract them into teaching. What his proposals add up to is a new society of new people; the trouble is that there is no known source of supply of either commodity.

Educational improvement will come as it always has come, from exposure of the bad spots and the attempt to remedy these in terms of the specific situations in which they arise and with the means already at hand. Many such attempts fail, some succeed. The successful devices are imitated in other places and in time there come significant changes of techniques and of emphasis. Uniformity and standardization are the worst enemies of the processes of improvement, for they destroy freedom to experiment at the risk of failure and they impair the flexibility required to adapt to varied local conditions.

Perhaps it is true that in some schools teaching must give way, to some degree, to therapy. But this should always be recognized as a diversion, however necessary, from the main business of the schools. The business of the schools is not to make children for whom basic personality changes petent adults. Of course they should have satisfactions and enjoyments along the way, but only as adults will they be able to live life in its fulness and depth. On this point Dewey was wrong. School *is* preparation, perhaps not for life as such but for adult life. School is not its own end. Therapy in the school should aim directly at fitting a child for the learning process. Children for whom basic personality changes are necessary need the services not of teachers but of psychiatrists.

How can we evaluate the work of the schools? It is likely that the effectiveness of schooling does not depend nearly so much as some people think on particular devices of organization or methods of instruction. Children grow up and they learn while this growing up goes on. Teaching is important, but more important are the attitudes of families and communities. Children respond to expectations, particularly to the expectations of those who care for them and show an interest in them. The potential of a school program is closely tied to its responsiveness to its pupils' eagerness to grow up and to be accepted and approved. But the very life of our society depends for its future upon the transmission to our youth of intellectual skills and a rational understanding of the physical and human world. Emotional growth comes out of the community of persons, a community to which we should hope the schools will belong but one which they cannot themselves construct and maintain.

To turn the schools into therapeutic institutions is fruitless if the potential for personal development is destroyed before children get to school. If schools must supply what the family supplied in traditional society they will have to begin much earlier. Plato recognized this and so have all communal societies. The recommendation of the Educational Policies Commission, reported recently in the press, would have mandatory schooling for four- and five-year-olds. The Commission notes that "education in this two-year period can effect the character of the child and all his future life more deeply than his education at any later period." The report goes on to say, "Early childhood education, properly conducted, promises significant benefits to American life."[8] But if we are to process children for the benefit of American life the time to start is not when they are four years old. The time to start, as these people well know, is at or before birth. The real challenge will be to get hold of the germ plasm itself. This will transform the Brave New World from dream to reality.

VII. *Frustration in College*

UNFORTUNATELY, Mr. Goodman's reforming zeal leads him to universalize his proper concern for the bad spots of our society and to treat the whole scene as just one big sore. With all their advantages the children of the more privileged classes still fail to fit the patterns he prescribes and so they too must be made over. Throughout his discussion is a disturbing absence of evidence that he has either the experience or conception of the intrinsic compelling power upon imagination and intellect of the subject matter of the traditional disciplines. This becomes increasingly troublesome as Mr. Goodman turns his attention to higher education.

Of course young people in college enjoy being objects of personal concern; they should be such objects and most of them are. They have friends and families and usually are in and out of love often enough to escape monotony. Those among them who are interested in the world of learning, however—and there are many more than one would suppose from reading Goodman, are concerned with the quality of their teachers' interest in the subjects of study rather than in the students' personal affairs. The dramas of ideas and of thought, the mysteries of mathematics and the sciences, the continuities of present and past brought to life in history, the fascination of thinking in other languages, these are some of the things good students get excited about and want from college. They do not see themselves as patients to be cured but as young people looking for enlightenment and understanding. This usually includes understanding themselves but without any strong need to have themselves made over. Many of them sense intuitively that a person who wants to change people just does not like people.

So often in reading Goodman it is hard to suppress the feeling that in some mysterious way there has flowed out and over the paper a stream of those vague, fleeting, uninspected ideas that float about in our minds as we shave or bathe or trim the grass or drive alone in our cars over familiar roads. The question these segments of print prompt is simply, "What is the point?" Soon the answer comes. These are things Mr. Goodman does not like and this is what he is telling us. The frustrations and anxieties of college-student life make him feel sad and forlorn and he wishes it were not so.

It may be fortunate, however, that the experience of youth is not more often entirely satisfying. If it were we would see more of those rather pitiable grown-up college boys and girls still bemused by Greek glamors and football frolics. Much of what Goodman says of the absurdities of the academic system is to the point. The "disposition to teach and grade like a machine, and to try to achieve in a human vacuum,"[9] is something to be resisted by any who want to preserve the human character of a college. But teaching which is on a personal level will be disturbing and frightening to many students just insofar as it is effective. Some cannot take it, and more of our drop-outs than we may realize are of this category. It is always easy to find a respectable reason to quit. But the condition of growth and of any genuinely advanced maturity is repeated failure and frustration and a moderate degree of tentative self-rejection. One suspects that only in primitive societies can childhood and youth be the idyllic states Paul Goodman regrets that our young people do not now enjoy.

Nothing illustrates this point better than some of his comments on the sex life of young people. Of course young people will experiment sexually and will have some sexual satisfactions. They are going to have sex one way or another; they always have and they always will. But the fact is that sex is too important and its fulfillment too exacting to be only a plaything of the moment or even of the season. The way to complete sexual satisfaction is one of fidelity and exclusive intimacy. That way has to be kept open. So long as a society is interested in strengthening the family it is to that society's interest to make sex outside of marriage, particularly for young people, both difficult and frustrating. We need to make it hard for them, not easy.

Mr. Goodman concedes that in the formal business of education the weaknesses of the colleges are not serious. The teachers, he says, "can be respected. Most of them know something and are not bad on their home grounds, in the classroom." The weaknesses are in the personal relationships within the academic community. In this "the colleges have become poor communities. Guidance comes from impersonal administration; sympathetic clarification of the students' confused ideas comes from nobody; and the teachers brush off attention to themselves."[10]

Here the underlying weaknesses of his proposals become explicit. For one thing, personal relationships cannot be generated or made to order. Such relationships are selective and for most of us they are restricted in scope. Perhaps only in rare marriages are there completely free and open disclosures. Many of those who teach college students do have close relationships with some of their students. There likely is as much or more of this in proportion than between lawyers and their clients, physicians and patients, or between ministers and priests and their parishioners. But such personal rapport is a by-product of the main business and depends upon accidents of temperament and emotional understanding. To set about to create personal relations is to insure that the relations established will be mostly impersonal.

Furthermore, it is not the business of teachers to provide "sympathetic clarification of the students' confused ideas." College teaching is not a process of telling the students the answers. Rather it is one of exposing the inadequacies of the answers offered and of pushing students, sometimes painfully and even rudely, to grope and grapple beyond the levels which have so far satisfied them. All who are genuine students, and this includes those of their teachers who are still inquiring, are in a state of continuing confusion. For each success raises new problems. The life of the mind is not one maintained by verbal tranquilizers but a life of incessant criticism and frustration and the search for new approaches. Out of this come no systems of pat formulas to be larded over bent heads in the name of learning, but rather a broadened and toughened understanding.

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[1] Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 55-56.

[2] Seymour Krim in *Book Week*, June 20, 1965, p. 3.

[3] *New Republic*, March 20, 1965, p. 20.

[4] Paul Goodman, *The Community of Scholars* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 168. Italics in original.

[5] "Higher Education and the System," *Commentary*, May 1963, p. 454.

[6] *Growing Up Absurd*, p. 82.

[7] *The Community of Scholars*, p. 102.

[8] Associated Press dispatch, May 31, 1966.

[9] *The Community of Scholars*, p. 120.

[10] *Op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.