

## Teaching of Mental Hygiene

FREDERIC FEICHTINGER, M.D., *New York*

At the present time Mental Hygiene is considered mainly as a specialty concerned with the prevention of maladjustment and mental diseases, and therefore closely related to psychiatry. That is not enough. We must realize and emphasize more and more how necessary it is that Mental Hygiene should develop into a science which deals with obtaining and preserving mental health in the broadest possible sense. That means a science which teaches healthy thinking, wanting, feeling, and behavior. Nor is it enough to practice Mental Hygiene only in the field of child education. Every age level can benefit by its proper teaching, understanding, and application. Mental Hygiene must be taught to many groups, not only to psychiatrists and other physicians, but to nurses, social workers, educators, ministers, and finally to every individual. Mental Hygiene must become an integral part of our culture, which means it has to become a science or a philosophy of living.

To a very great extent we really do not know how to live successfully, how to be content, and how to be happy. The destruction we have witnessed during the past decade, destruction of man and of human values, speaks a horrifying language. How is this possible since we have so many scientific theories, so many philosophies and teachings? The reason is that we do not possess an understandable, workable, and universal philosophy of practical living. It must be possible to form and to teach such a philosophy, to learn how to live more naturally, more maturely, more sincerely, more humanely, and with more understanding. It must be possible to live more successfully, more contentedly, more happily, in every phase of life, in different kinds of environments, in different occupations, at different age-levels, and under constantly changing circumstances. It must be possible to live with less fear and anxiety, with less tension, restlessness, frustration, confusion, and with less aggressiveness, corruption, and destruction.

If Mental Hygiene means healthy thinking, wanting, feeling, and behaving, it also means civilization, culture, morality, and harmony in man's living. We have to learn it and to teach it in order to avoid a final chaos in man's existence. If we want to teach Mental Hygiene successfully, we must use the language of the people. Today millions all over the world are sick in mind, spirit, and morale, and we all are very much in need of guidance and leadership and are impatiently and desperately searching for it. We are overwhelmed by science and by scientists who forget that science in itself is relative and stands on many hypothetical theories. What we need

is a plausible, useful explanation of the laws of nature and of society to give us more and more the understanding and realization that each as a single individual is part of the whole universe.

Science to a great extent has become more and more the slave of materialism. In seeking new methods to possess and to become physically comfortable, we have learned so much to take things apart, to analyze, to scrutinize, that finally we seem to have lost sight of the total and universal functioning of life and of man. Very often we do not know where we stand nor what to do next. The urgent need today is for a synthesis of living; an understanding of how to live and for what purpose.

There can be no doubt that in everybody's life there is a meaning, a purpose. Everyone has an aim, a goal, a purpose in whatever he is doing. That aim may be a useful or a useless one; it may be positive or negative from the point of view of the community. Every function we can observe has a purpose, and living is in itself, functioning with a purpose.

It remains a fact that no one knows what life is. No one understands the great miracle and wonder of the cycle of life and universal organization. We can only see and study the manifestations of life, in regard to its functions. But we can learn and know what living means, how we think, how we act and how we behave.

Through our observations over a period of a few thousand years, living presents itself as a very organized process which always has proven itself as purposeful or—as it is called—teleologic or finalistic. It is a fundamental law that the purpose of this process is to maintain life, to adapt the organism to ever-changing situations, and to keep it in harmony with the whole universal cycle. We see plants and trees grow, develop, struggle for existence, adjust and adapt to ever-changing conditions and situations. We see a whole animal world living, growing, multiplying, adapting to many changing situations over a period of millions of years as if these plant and animal worlds were following definite laws,—laws we have forgotten or perhaps do not yet understand. There are and must be certain laws governing the existence of every living creature beginning with the amoeba and continuing to the highest developed creature, man. All living creatures must obey and must have obeyed these laws, otherwise life would have ceased long ago. These laws hold true for man, too. For man also the same purpose must exist, the purpose of maintenance of life, of adaptation to ever-changing conditions and situations, and of keeping in harmony with the whole universal cycle.

The important question now is: How is this purpose of self-maintenance and adaptation, in plain words, the purpose of "living," secured?

Nobody knows when, in a world of physical matter and energy, the first spark of life appeared. We cannot date the first appearance of organic matter which, in contrast to physical matter, is able to maintain itself, to

react towards outside influences and stimulations in a purposive, teleologic way, using these outside influences for its own purpose, and adapting itself to these constantly changing influences. We call this fundamental organic matter "protoplasm"; it is the very substance of all living creatures from bacteria to plant cells, animal cells, and to the highest form of cell organization including man. Protoplasm is already an extremely highly organized system with highly complex functions. It will be understood now that life is not just matter and not just function. Life is a purposive, teleologic, finalistic functioning with the purpose of self-maintenance, of adaptation, and of keeping in harmony with the universal laws.

But how is that purposive functioning brought about? In every living organism we see first a number of physical and chemical functions like metabolism, growth, etc., but also another group of functions which we describe from our human viewpoint as psychic functions or psychic phenomena. The highest forms of these psychic functions we describe finally as "mental functions." It now becomes obvious and it cannot be stressed enough that all psychic phenomena are functions of organic matter, of protoplasm. Consequently, we can no longer think in terms of body and psyche as two separate or different entities. If we analyze the psychic functions of every living organism further, we can differentiate between two types of functions. First, the primary, innate, inherited, or so-called phylogenetic reactions known as instincts; and second, individually acquired, experienced, learned, or so-called ontogenetic reactions or functions. Finally both forms, the inherited reactions (from former generations) and the acquired reactions or experiences, become more and more integrated into a total pattern of reaction, function, action, or behavior of an organism. Man finally emerges as a highly complex protoplasmatic organization.

Man, like other organisms, is a product of evolution during a period of millions of years. Even at the top of the evolutionary scale he must obey the universal laws of nature. Through the high development of man he can find quicker, better, healthier and more conscious ways of maintenance, adaptation, and harmony within the universe. Everything we possess, our instinctive forces, our senses, our intellects, our reasoning power and our spiritual forces serve and have to serve the same purpose.

It is extremely doubtful if man has reached that aim. Nor is it certain that man has been willing to strive toward that goal in spite of his possessing, through evolution, the best equipment a living creature ever has been gifted with.

What is really wrong with man? Man knows much about the physical and chemical facts of his existence; he knows that he must eat for a purpose, digest for a purpose, breathe for a purpose. He realizes that inflammation has a purpose, that fever has a purpose, that most of his bodily

functions in health and sickness have a purpose. Man is even willing to understand that his intellect has a purpose; he is willing to apply it to such disciplines as science, technology, and art. But he is usually completely lost when you ask him: What is the real purpose of a total personality in this world?

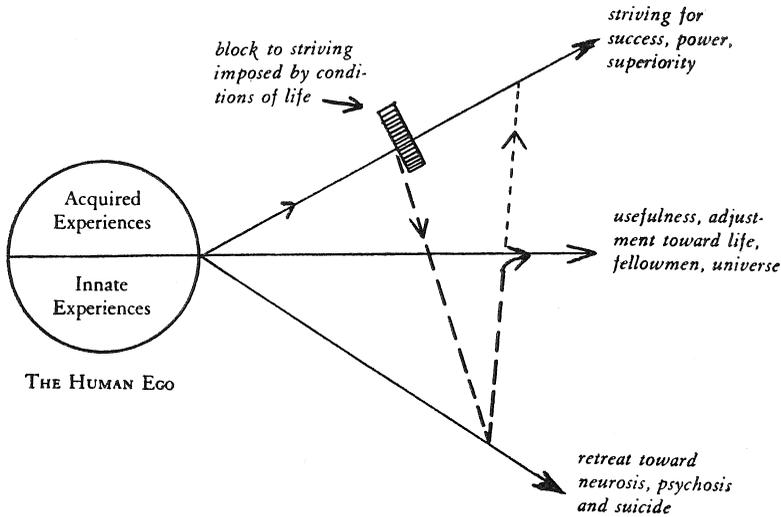
One answer is that man is only one part of the total life of the universe which includes all the plants and all the animals, and consequently he has to integrate into the whole. We see again and again that plants and animals are functioning in such a way that the purpose of their life is accomplished and fulfilled in a very natural, coordinated, cooperative, integrative, and harmonious way as long as man does not interfere too much!

Why cannot man do things in the same normal, natural way and coordinate, integrate, and harmonize? For man, with his highly developed psychic and mental functions, is something unique here in this world. Yet he is far from being perfect. Man is torn within himself, between his instincts and reasoning. Man is also torn between himself and the outside world. The reason for the latter situation is that man has developed a unique form of consciousness, his ego-consciousness, which makes it possible for him to experience his own world and to live in his own world, and finally to come into strong opposition with the real, outside world. In spite of the fact that the real world is an experience in man's mind and that everybody experiences the outside world differently, the truth remains that there *is* an outside world. Although there are millions of other individuals, of other egos with millions of different conceptions of the world, there is a real universe. The constant existence of conflicts between the world of instincts and the world of reason, between the ego-world and the outside-world, makes it extremely difficult for any human being to find a unified goal in keeping with the principle of living in harmony with the universe.

It is man's gift of ego-consciousness that leads him constantly to a striving for superiority, for power, and for supremacy; that makes it difficult for him to find his way to his fellow man, and to bring himself into harmonious relationship with the world.

The tremendous task of society and in particular of Mental Hygiene will be to educate mankind more and more for the purpose of real living. Man must learn to integrate his own world with the outside-world. He must learn to find his way from instinct to reason, and from ego-reasoning to universal-reasoning. There will not be much progress so long as man and mankind do not change from a goal of self, of ego, to a definite goal of adjustment, adaptation, and integration. We have long hoped to find a way to live in peace with each other. But we still live in a world in which each individual has his personal aim, his private goal. The constant striving of each of us for success and for prestige leads finally only to conflict.

The diagram which follows shows the three main alternate courses which the ego may choose, together with their inter-relationships:



GENETIC-DYNAMIC DIAGRAM FOR TEACHING MENTAL HYGIENE

To avoid conflict, man must change fundamentally to an entirely different goal, to the goal of becoming an adjusted human being, a wholesome human being, who is willing and able to feel, to think, and to act in the interest of his fellow men.

Finally, the logical question is: What shall we learn? Man cannot help but strive for his self-aim, his self-purpose, for the very reason of the maintenance of his life. But he should learn and remember that he, the individual, is always part of the whole, part of the family, of the community, of society, of the earth, and of the universe. That must be his aim, his goal, his purpose: To be and to remain the part of the whole and to keep in harmony with it.

Man on earth is like a guest in a big house which becomes his home for the span of his life. The house is beautifully equipped with all the necessities for living, all the resources, the soil, the good earth with all the flowers, the plants, the trees, the forests. The necessary light, sunshine, and heat are supplied. There is rain, there is water, there is a harmonious change of seasons, there are day and night. All other forms of life on this earth finally become man's supply, securing his very existence. There is abundant food in this home, on this earth. But man is not alone. He cannot exist as an individual. He shares that home with millions of other

fellow men who are also guests. Consequently he has to learn to share those things which the earth—his home—offers.

Man still has to learn how to manage, how to stop despoiling the earth. For through his shortsightedness he succeeds in disorganizing and destroying much of nature's resources. Man behaves toward the world more like a thief than a guest, and towards his fellow man he behaves more like an enemy than a friend. He must learn to be a guest, a friend, and a brother. Instead of trying to get and possess as much as he can, instead of trying to dominate in that home and even kill his brother, who stands in his way, he must turn more and more towards his fellow man and share the home, share the fruits of the earth, cooperate, help and give—give more, and take less. We have to learn to use our minds for the purpose of living together and doing things together. We must learn to think, not just about ourselves but also in terms of all of us. Human nature is very complex and therefore very difficult to understand. Very often man does not understand himself. But do not forget that, among all creatures, he is one gifted with the capacity for thought. Consequently he must learn to think and to understand his fellow man as much as possible, to understand his feelings, his thoughts, his desires and his actions. Although we may never understand him completely since we cannot study his psychic functions as we can his physical functions, we can still assay, interpret, and reach conclusions according to our inner psychic experiences. We can become interested in our fellow man, we can become tolerant and thoughtful of his rights and so think more of our own responsibilities. We can become humane, helpful, considerate, friendly, and social-minded. To live thus might well become the goal of man.

Do we now have to change our very human nature? That is neither possible nor necessary. What we have to do (and this we must do sooner or later if we want to avoid catastrophe) is to alter the goals of our thought and action. We must turn more and more from self, from ego, from selfishness toward our fellow man. We must help each other toward life, toward living, as one would help a man who is wandering in the wrong direction. "Living" means: To be alive together, to feel together, to think together, to cooperate with everything we can be aware of. It is not necessary that man should sacrifice himself like a martyr. Let man always stand on two healthy legs, one of self-interest, and the other of social and universal interest.

The teaching of this truer understanding of living and change of purpose in man lies in the realm of Mental Hygiene. At no point in the history of man has it been more urgent that this science be developed and the scope of its teaching widened to embrace every individual who is part of the whole.

We all will wander again and again in the wrong direction, but if we remind ourselves and if we are reminded about a better road, a better direction, we always can turn around again. There is still time left—but not much time. The clock of atomic time ticks louder and louder. So let us wake up before the alarm rings and shocks our world into an inferno. Let us wake up and turn around before it is too late.