

What Is Creative Living in Modern America?

This husband-and-wife team suggests that our "basic attitude toward effective human relationships should be that all normal human beings have an insatiable desire to be creative and productive members of society."

WHEN "Modern America" is used as a title or in a title of a discussion, one begins to wonder what is meant. Of course there are many answers to the question of its meaning, but two seem to be more prevalent at the moment. Perhaps as simple a way to describe these divergent points of view is to contrast them:

WHAT IS "MODERN AMERICA"?

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| a. A conglomerate, a hodgepodge of peoples and cultures | a. An amazing and productive richness arising from a blending of peoples and cultures |
| b. A cacophony of discordant and dissonant sounds | b. A symphony of man at work and at play in a creative and free atmosphere |
| c. A bedlam of confusion, conflict and irrelevant choices | c. A vast number of problems, a stimulating diversity of ideas and opinions, a wide range of choices |
| d. A nation of routinized robots: in their work — mechanized men; in their play— vicarious participants in canned or screened entertainment | d. A nation of amazing technology with automation as technological progress; a nation whose drudgery is replaced by machines and whose creative abilities are thereby released |

e. Modern man — an end product of a family gone to pot and an educational system gone dead; too little control, too few to control, too many children; too few and too small schools; too many disinterested parents relegating their jobs to public education; too little attention to the fundamentals; "they" can't read or write or spell, or do arithmetic; "they" take too many electives; "they" are not "educated" but only "socialized" and "adjusted."

e. Modern man is the product of a family that has changed to meet changes in the whole structure of society; he is the product of an educational system in constant process of adaptation to change and yet holding steadily to proven fundamentals; a diversity in curriculum to offer opportunity to a heterogeneous group of children and youth; an educational system for all—for dullards, for the mediocre, for geniuses; an intricate system dedicated not to a few but toward adaptability, flexibility, toward creativity on whatever level of endeavor these children may participate.

As Eduard Lindeman wrote in *Mental Health and the Moral Crisis of Our Times*, the healthy minded person never accepts black as black or white as white. Neither of these pictures of Modern America is true. Each has an essence of truth within it. Without the former pessimistic picture with the accentuation of

problems, conflicts, and crises, there would be no need to strive to create the latter with its optimistic tone. No need exists to discuss creativity as a personality process or as a way of living if there is no need to create in order to solve problems and to contribute to social growth and survival. Complete self-satisfaction or complete negativism can lead nowhere save to dissolution.

As long as there is recognition of problems with needs—even demands—for solution, then creative living, on the part of man in his society, is assured. However, this demands one other assurance—that man will have the right and the freedom to pursue a variety of courses toward the solution of problems.

Herein lies the ideological strength of the United States—a faith, a belief, in the right and the ability to experiment, to change, to develop, to try constructive approaches to personal and social needs. Dictatorship of the radical *right* or the radical *left* denies these rights and thereby stifles the essential quality of creative man in a creative society. For creative living, personal or group, the right of dissent, the right to do something different, the right to prove a new way may be the better way, are necessities.

In a dictatorship, adaptation of invention is toward preconceived ends with preconceived ways toward that end implied if not demanded. Destruction will eventually result since creativity in personality or in society cannot come from authoritarian control. Creativity exists in its most productive form where control is self-control, where discipline is self-discipline. Strict authority demands replication, forbids creation.

Gordon Allport in his book, *Becoming*, says, "Fortunately, creative controversy is possible in our free society." To quote him, "Our censure should be reserved for

those who would close all doors but one. The surest way to lose truth is to pretend that one already wholly possesses it. For narrow systems, dogmatically held, tend to trivialize the mentality" Allport concludes that "dogmatism makes for scientific anemia." It may well be said that it substitutes memory for creative thinking.

Civilization and Creative Man

Lester F. Ward, one of the "Big Six" in sociology in America, stresses the civilizing ability of man for himself as his creativity develops new and better plant life, new and better animals, and new and better products from the earth and the factory. Improvement on nature has not only been the act of genius but of ingenuity of "little" men as well.

Gilbert Highet in his little book, *Man's Unconquerable Mind*, reminds that man can transcend his destiny not only by defying it, but also by understanding it. Through exploration into the unknown, and through improvisation on the known, man has created new needs, new hopes, new ideals, new ways of doing his work and of living with his fellowmen.

Man, then, has not only produced civilization, but by his creativity has actually changed himself—created a new man. To quote Ward again, man has adapted nature to his needs. And it must be remembered that as he has adapted nature, he has had to adapt to his own adaptations! By his creativity, man creates the need to recreate himself. By his changed—or revolutionary—ideas, ways of doing things, techniques for meeting problems, the impact is great enough or cumulative enough to take him and his fellowmen into a changed world.

¹ Gordon Allport. *Becoming*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955. p. 17-18.

Creativity and the Rebel

Dissatisfaction is the motivating power behind creativity. Nowhere is the phrase, "Divine Discontent" more applicable. Essentially, creativity toward progress comes only when there is dissatisfaction with the customary, with the *status quo*, strong enough to push toward new solutions.

This is very literally the history of "the American Way of Life." The nation began in revolution. Its government was set up on the still-not-too-generally accepted belief in the ability of man to govern himself. The boundaries of the nation were pushed west to the Pacific as pioneers sought new horizons. Technology, the like of which the world has never seen, came out of the freedom to invent, to experiment, to produce a second "Industrial Revolution." It came also out of the willingness of man to pool his findings with other men, out of the willingness of groups of men to combine their capacities to meet a need, a problem, a goal, an ideal.

Bagehot calls this creative rebelliousness "breaking through the cake of custom." Brewster Ghiselin in his exploration of creativity entitled, *Creative Process*, calls this "breaking through the power of the established" or breaking the hold of "what we know and what we are."

Creativity, Ghiselin says, demands the understanding that the *known* is not absolute but is only an instrument toward new knowledge. "Rebel" as here used is not the rebellion of total destruction, but a willingness to sacrifice at least a part of the old in seeking out the new and the better. This, of course, is not always comfortable, but it is the only hope of a better world or a better solution to the problems of the world which already exists.

A note of caution needs to be added

here. Not all change is good or beautiful or progressive. Sometimes in this country of rapid change, the notion has been expressed that anything that is new is bound to be better. This has put a false value on creativity and suggests a definition of rebellion as destruction of all that is old in favor of anything that is new.

Charles Horton Cooley in his *Social Organization* points out that for rebellion—i. e., change toward progress—there must be a strong institutional base. Cooley argues that "rebel"—the creative man—can only overthrow or reorganize or reconstruct by having a thorough knowledge of the past.

He states it thus, "... all innovation is based on conformity; all heterodoxy on orthodoxy; all individuality on solidarity." Nothing new can be created or developed which does not have its cultural or social heritage.

An ignorant man is never a creative man. He does not have at his command the *stuff* out of which creativity comes. Nor is a non-imaginative man a creative man. He is unable to see through the cake of custom.

Creativeness, then, has as its building blocks a thorough knowledge of what already exists in the "field" range—to adapt Lewin's term—of the person, an accumulation of facts which have proven their worth through a time span; a knowledge of the arrangement, of design in this particular field of facts; imagination about how these may be rearranged, restructured, redesigned. This holds

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whether "the field" is human relations, science, technology, or ditch digging.

Cooley insists that creative men are not hostile to criticism. They, themselves, by their very creativity are hyper-critics in their own right. *No criticism*—out of stupidity, or sheer ignorance, or indifference, or out of fear of change—stultifies the inventive mind.

A Few Essentials for Creativity

Freedom with self-discipline and self-responsibility has been offered as the first essential for creativity. Dissatisfaction with things as they are was mentioned. Curiosity might well be added as another of the basic elements. When a person or group of persons begins to probe, to search, to find, to ferret out new ideals, new goals, new ways of doing things, then the process of discovery is on the way. Rearrangements, redesign become possible.

"Projecting around" was the boyhood phrase for curiosity used by a play group down in Louisiana on the Sabine River. Here was "imagination, free flowing; curiosity on the loose." They dived for mussels to throw into a hornets nest to see what would happen. They tested out their curiosity—and then they dived again to avoid the product of that same curiosity. Parenthetically, one could compare this to the world in a deep dive to avoid the product of its curiosity which produced the fission of the atom! And that is always the chance one takes when curiosity is turned loose to "project around" a problem.

Alex Osborn in his book for business and industry, *Applied Imagination*, reports a study of F. L. Wells in which high salaried and average salaried personnel were tested to determine differences. These men rated about the same on four measures of intellectual capacity.

But the higher salaried rated higher in curiosity, in imagination, in creativity. They were able to think up more things to do, more things to try, more new ways of approaching a problem.

Contrary to the ideas of many, routine and creativity are not diametrically opposed. Much creativity comes out of ways of improving on routine procedures. Much routine work is involved in every creative process. Parenthood, as an example, is probably the most creative of all relationships and yet no one denies the routine and the hard work involved in being parents. Many of the more revolutionary inventions of industry have come "off the line" as well as "from the top" in management.

Tension—another of the maligned conditions of Modern America—is called "a prerequisite to creative thinking" by Agnes Meyer in her autobiography, *Out of These Roots*. By the same token, problems which create tension—and what problems do not?—are incitement to creativity.

Gordon Allport says only through risk taking and variation can growth occur. Creative man—the scientist, the artist, the teacher, the parent, the technologist, the line worker—by the very nature of what he does creates answers to some and, at the same time, other new problems. Striving to answer questions, to gain solutions to problems, to set new goals, Allport believes, "confers unity on the personality but it is not the unity of fulfillment, of repose, of reduced tension."

The Creative Process

Creativity, in the minds of some, is a process of spontaneous combustion. Whatever comes, comes full blown. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Robert L. Sutherland has outlined the

process for top management in industry in a number of recent discussion conferences.

A problem, needing a constructive answer, Sutherland would agree, is the first step. This may be a need for a new design in airplanes, a need for new approaches to labor-management relations, a different emphasis in foreign policy, a better way to hold the attention of 50 ten-year-olds, a need to express in form, structure, perspective and design, beauty or aesthetic value in the form of a symphony or in a painting.

To answer the need or to solve the problem, the creator begins to gather known facts. As Cooley would say, he begins to reap the harvest of his cultural and social heritage. As Sutherland would say, "he goes to work to gather information he knows he will need."

Eliot Dole Hutchinson, in his chapter, "Period of Frustration in Creative Endeavor," in *A Study of Interpersonal Relations* edited by Patrick Mullahy, calls this the period of preparation. It is based on a lifetime acquisition of technical habits, skills and knowledge. The "reaches of past experiences," as he expresses it, are the reservoirs from which come the facts of creativity.

Sutherland points out that following this period of intense routine, work, concentration and study, there comes a time when release of tension is a necessity or creativity may die aborning. This is a period of ripening or germinating within the personality, the distinctive and unique crucible of creativity.

A time of complete relaxation may be sought with the family, with friends, with music, with books, out in the open doing little of anything—wherever there may be a re-creative relationship or experience.

Hutchinson sees this period as a time

of intense restlessness, of self-doubt, of giving up, of near neuroticism. He agrees with Sutherland that this demands a pattern of changed activity. He calls this the period of insight which terminates tension; where a new alignment of hypotheses is found; where there is a breaking through or transcending of the old. Sutherland and Hutchinson conclude the creative process with painstaking testing, verification, elaboration, and evaluation. This, Hutchinson insists, is necessary to correct exaggeration and over-statement, which, in itself, is an integral part of the period of insight.

Discipline and Creativity

Self-discipline is a permeating element in all creativity. Without it, the tedious, arduous, long-drawn-out gathering of facts and attainment of skills necessary to activate the facts, to rearrange and restructure them would never take place.

Ghiselin states it very simply. A great deal of work is necessary to activate the mind for invention or creativity. This work must be done consciously and with effort. He inventories the steps of preparation as: the mastering of accumulated knowledge; the gathering of new facts; observing, exploring and experimenting; development of techniques and skills; increasing sensitivity and discrimination in choice of facts. All of these, he says, are more or less conscious and voluntary activity.

Sutherland emphasizes still another place where discipline plays a major role. Only the self-disciplined man will test and retest; design and redesign; write and rewrite; paint and repaint his "invention," his "picture," his "novel," his "idea."

And there may be added one other disciplinary element to creativity. The creator needs always to realize the more

revolutionary, the more creative his idea, invention, design, picture or pattern of human relationships, the longer will he have to wait to see its acceptance and its validity demonstrated by general use.

Ghiselin has a conclusion to offer to this discussion of discipline and creativity when he writes, "Understanding, discipline, and hard work are essential to creativity but to it must be added, high and sustained effort for a lifetime."

However, he impresses that this is not all. The creative man—the creative society—must have fresh insight. Distrust of deviation must never be allowed to take over. "Every new and good thing is liable to seem eccentric and dangerous at first glimpse. . . . Therefore, we must always listen to the voice of eccentricity within ourselves and within our world."

If the United States is to continue toward creative progress as it has in its past, it must continue to listen to its eccentrics, its innovators, its inventors, its creators, its rebels.

Creativity as a Social Process

Creativity is, then, a social process. As Cooley has said, it is based in all that has gone before. Every new invention has within it a social heritage and the genius of many men.

Instead of creativity stemming from contemplative isolation apart from the facts of life, there is evidence that in some situations and for some problems a group is better than a series of lone men.

Alex Osborn reports a group of 20 engineers who were divided into one group of ten, while the other ten worked, each alone. The work from the group assayed 44 per cent more worth-while ideas than those accumulated from the ten lone workers.

General William F. Dean so beautifully expressed this in his autobiographi-

cal study of his imprisonment. He wrote that one of the greatest problems of solitary confinement was his inability to test his ideas against another's and thereby to discover them sane or mad.

For creativity to be completed, it must be shared. It must be communicated to others, shared at least in part by others. It must be tested against others and pass the test, at least in time.

Creativity and Modern Schools

The family, the church and the schools share the major role in the development of personality. What of these schools, overcrowded, undermanned, ill-housed? What of these schools now accused of "stifling the individual," "neglecting the fundamentals," "regimenting youth," "striving for the socialized and adjusted personality," these schools where "children play their way through" and take only "easy electives"?

Perhaps the answers to all these accusations lie in a few facts and in the need for creative and constructive inventions to meet some real and some spurious problems. Perhaps, too, it is well to remember that public schools—or private, for that matter—do not exist for any one group: brilliant or dull or mediocre; rich or poor or in between; upper, lower or middle; or creed or color. Schools, in a creative country like Modern America exist for all and therefore, must hold and educate all.

To be truly productive of creativity, schools cannot afford to "neglect or benumb the talented," as Hight puts it. No matter the exigencies, he tells us, "The secret of education is never to forget the possibility of greatness."

Harry Overstreet has speculated on what would happen to education, to schooling, if all curriculum were planned upon the basic premise that *all* children

and youth have limitless potentialities were they released by *how* and *what* is taught.

Norman A. H. Meier has speculated in a like vein when he suggests that the basic attitude toward effective human relationships should be that all normal human beings have an insatiable desire to be creative and productive members of society.

Where could education—schooling—not go if these were the two fundamental drives behind all administrators and teachers? Moreover, never did a world or a nation need such a basic motivating philosophy as much as now when it is engulfed in problems which are so difficult to answer.

Education should combine the desire to learn with a thorough realization that no possibility exists to learn all there is to know or to learn all one needs to learn. As Highet puts it, "It [education] has a sense of perpetual surprise."

Adjustability, flexibility of ideas and thought processes, plus basic spiritual values are essentials for living in Modern America. To circumscribe education into the context of a few subject areas and neglect the learnings for creative functioning in human relations and social situations is truly to turn out an endless chain of robots.

Socialization, in its broadest and richest meaning, and flexibility in interpersonal relationships, are the opposite of mechanization. Socialization is the ability to adapt, to meet change, to roll with the punches, to face "agonizing reappraisals" as have our physicists as well as our secretaries of state and our men on the streets!

Socialization is the ability to be at home in a rapidly changing world and to contribute creatively to this change.

This is creative living in the modern world.

The Creative Personality

The creative personality may be found anywhere and everywhere. He may be described as a personality developed out of rich experiences from the past, a generous helping of the diversity, complexity and variety of the present, and with a keen desire to have a share in the shaping of the future.

The creative person—to adapt from Gordon Allport—is a self-assertive, self-critical, and self-improving person with a passion for integrity, with a near divine discontent, and with a meaningful relationship with the whole of Being, with God.

To find a release for creativity one must live in a society—a nation or culture—with a measure of rationality, a portion of freedom, a generic conscience, with ideals based in a realization of the unique value and dignity of man.

Clinical studies have shown that the continuous repression of creative desire may bring actual breakdown or deterioration of personality.

Eliot Hutchinson has written that to stifle creative interest is no incidental matter. It cuts at the very root of satisfaction in living.

In the long run, the possibility of creation, of invention, is the salvation of personality, itself. It is the guarantee of health and effectiveness—not its undoing.

The Creative Teacher

The creative teacher is many things. Kenneth Herrold says a teacher needs the perspective and sensitivity of an artist, the patience of Job, the creativity of genius, and the physical strength of a ditch digger.

The creative teacher strives constantly that those whom he teaches may surpass him. Because of this desire to furnish strong shoulders on which youth may stand, the creative teacher is not afraid of curiosity and imagination or of eccentricity in those whom he teaches. He sees himself as stimulator of the investigative process. He sees himself as the developer of latent creativity—at least to some degree and in some form.

Higbet has again worded it beautifully when he says creative teachers "recognize the almost limitless treasure of ability and creativity that every pupil carries about in the locked safe of his mind," and he, the teacher, always "hopes and strives to unlock it."

Love as the Creative Emotion

Spurgeon English, and many others, call love the most creative of all emotions. Religionists say it even more simply from the Bible itself, "God is love."

Is it not true, then, that creativeness derives primarily from love expressed as interest in and essential respect for one's fellow men? The personality permeated by and motivated by love takes into account the needs, the ambitions, the desires, the problems, the griefs, the successes of others around him.

The creative man projects himself into the world and its problems rather than secreting himself from his fellow men in a wilderness or a garret. Creativity cannot stem from withdrawal from man, his problems, his ideas, his emotions.

Creativity, then, may be used in a very special sense: creativeness as constructive contribution to one's fellow men—consciously or unconsciously so directed. Inventions, in themselves, may be destructive. *Creative* inventions, constructive in inception, mean change with progress in man and his relationships with his fellow men, in man with his God, in his concept of beauty, and in his technology.

Creative man in Modern America—or any other land—never realizes his dreams or his answers. Always he builds. As a goal, as an ideal, is not *creativity, itself*, the "hidden weapon" in "Modern American Living"?

The question is unanswered. The quest leads to Eternity.

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