

These proposed reforms, which are still in the discussion stage and are of purely American interest, need not concern us here. Nor can I discuss the more technical, yet in the long run perhaps even more important question of how to reform the curricula of elementary and secondary schools in all countries so as to bring them up to the entirely new requirements of the present world. What is of importance to our argument is a twofold question. Which aspects of the modern world and its crisis have actually revealed themselves in the educational crisis, that is, what are the true reasons that for decades things could be said and done in such glaring contradiction to common sense? And, second, what can we learn from this crisis for the essence of education—not in the sense that one can always learn from mistakes what ought not to be done, but rather by reflecting on the role that education plays in every civilization, that is on the obligation that the existence of children entails for every human society. We shall begin with the second question.

III

A crisis in education would at any time give rise to serious concern even if it did not reflect, as in the present instance it does, a more general crisis and instability in modern society. For education belongs among the most elementary and necessary activities of human society, which never remains as it is but continuously renews itself through birth, through the arrival of new human beings. These newcomers, moreover, are not finished but in a state of becoming. Thus the child, the subject of education, has for the educator a double aspect: he is new in a world that is strange to him and he is in process of becoming, he is a new human being and he is a becoming human being. This double aspect is by no means self-evident and it does not apply to the animal forms of life; it corresponds to a double relationship, the relationship to the world on the one hand and to life on the other. The child shares the state of becoming with all living things; in respect to life and its development, the child is a human being in process of becoming, just as a kitten is a cat in process of becoming. But the child is new only in relation to a world that was there before him, that will continue after his death, and in which he is to spend his life. If the child were not a newcomer in this human world but simply a not yet finished living creature, education would be just a function of life and would need to consist in nothing save that concern for the sustenance of life and that training and practice in living that all animals assume in respect to their young.

Human parents, however, have not only summoned their children into life

through conception and birth, they have simultaneously introduced them into a world. In education they assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world. These two responsibilities do not by any means coincide; they may indeed come into conflict with each other. The responsibility for the development of the child turns in a certain sense against the world: the child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation.

Because the child must be protected against the world, his traditional place is in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw into the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which people's private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive. This holds good not only for the life of childhood but for human life in general. Wherever the latter is consistently exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security its vital quality is destroyed. In the public world, common to all, persons count, and so does work, that is, the work of our hands that each of us contributes to our common world; but life *qua* life does not matter there. The world cannot be regardful of it, and it has to be hidden and protected from the world.

Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness and, however strong its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs the security of darkness to grow at all. This may indeed be the reason that children of famous parents so often turn out badly. Fame penetrates the four walls, invades their private space, bringing with it, especially in present-day conditions, the merciless glare of the public realm, which floods everything in the private lives of those concerned, so that the children no longer have a place of security where they can grow. But exactly the same destruction of the real living space occurs wherever the attempt is made to turn the children themselves into a kind of world. Among these peer groups then arises public life of a sort and, quite apart from the fact that it is not a real one and that the whole attempt is a sort of fraud, the damaging fact remains that children—that is, human beings in process of becoming but not yet complete—are thereby forced to expose themselves to the light of a public existence.

That modern education, insofar as it attempts to establish a world of children, destroys the necessary conditions for vital development and growth seems obvious. But that such harm to the developing child should be the result of modern education strikes one as strange indeed, for this education maintained

that its exclusive aim was to serve the child and rebelled against the methods of the past because these had not sufficiently taken into account the child's inner nature and his needs. "The Century of the Child," as we may recall, was going to emancipate the child and free him from the standards derived from the adult world. Then how could it happen that the most elementary conditions of life necessary for the growth and development of the child were overlooked or simply not recognized? How could it happen that the child was exposed to what more than anything else characterized the adult world, its public aspect, after the decision had just been reached that the mistake in all past education had been to see the child as nothing but an undersized grown-up?

The reason for this strange state of affairs has nothing directly to do with education; it is rather to be found in the judgments and prejudices about the nature of private life and public world and their relation to each other which have been characteristic of modern society since the beginning of modern times and which educators, when they finally began, relatively late, to modernize education, accepted as self-evident assumptions without being aware of the consequences they must necessarily have for the life of the child. It is the peculiarity of modern society, and by no means a matter of course, that it regards life, that is, the earthly life of the individual as well as the family, as the highest good; and for this reason, in contrast to all previous centuries, emancipated this life and all the activities that have to do with its preservation and enrichment from the concealment of privacy and exposed them to the light of the public world. This is the real meaning of the emancipation of workers and women, not as persons, to be sure, but insofar as they fulfill a necessary function in the life-process of society.

The last to be affected by this process of emancipation were the children, and the very thing that had meant a true liberation for the workers and the women—because they were not only workers and women but persons as well, who therefore had a claim on the public world, that is, a right to see and be seen in it, to speak and be heard—was an abandonment and betrayal in the case of the children, who are still at the stage where the simple fact of life and growth outweighs the factor of personality. The more completely modern society discards the distinction between what is private and what is public, between what can thrive only in concealment and what needs to be shown to all in the full light of the public world, the more, that is, it introduces between the private and the public a social sphere in which the private is made public and vice versa, the harder it makes things for its children, who by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed.

However serious these infringements of the conditions for vital growth may

be, it is certain that they were entirely unintentional; the central aim of all modern education efforts has been the welfare of the child, a fact that is, of course, no less true even if the efforts made have not always succeeded in promoting the child's welfare in the way that was hoped. The situation is entirely different in the sphere of educational tasks directed no longer toward the child but toward the young person, the newcomer and stranger, who has been born into an already existing world which he does not know. These tasks are primarily, but not exclusively, the responsibility of the schools; they have to do with teaching and learning; the failure in this field is the most urgent problem in America today. What lies at the bottom of it?

Normally the child is first introduced to the world in school. Now school is by no means the world and must not pretend to be; it is rather the institution that we interpose between the private domain of home and the world in order to make the transition from the family to the world possible at all. Attendance there is required not by the family but by the state, that is by the public world, and so, in relation to the child, school in a sense represents the world, although it is not yet actually the world. At this stage of education adults, to be sure, once more assume a responsibility for the child, but by now it is not so much responsibility for the vital welfare of a growing thing as for what we generally call the free development of characteristic qualities and talents. This, from the general and essential point of view, is the uniqueness that distinguishes every human being from every other, the quality by virtue of which he is not only a stranger in the world but something that has never been here before.

Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is. In any case, however, the educators here stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is. This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world. Anyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them.

In education this responsibility for the world takes the form of authority. The authority of the educator and the qualifications of the teacher are not the same thing. Although a measure of qualification is indispensable for authority, the highest possible qualification can never by itself beget authority. The teacher's qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world.

Vis-à-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world.

Now we all know how things stand today in respect to authority. Whatever one's attitude toward this problem may be, it is obvious that in public and political life authority either plays no role at all—for the violence and terror exercised by the totalitarian countries have, of course, nothing to do with authority—or at most plays a highly contested role. This, however, simply means, in essence, that people do not wish to require of anyone or to entrust to anyone the assumption of responsibility for everything else, for wherever true authority existed it was joined with responsibility for the course of things in the world. If we remove authority from political and public life, it may mean that from now on an equal responsibility for the course of the world is to be required of everyone. But it may also mean that the claims of the world and the requirements of order in it are being consciously or unconsciously repudiated; all responsibility for the world is being rejected, the responsibility for giving orders no less than for obeying them. There is no doubt that in the modern loss of authority both intentions play a part and have often been simultaneously and inextricably at work together.

In education, on the contrary, there can be no such ambiguity in regard to the present-day loss of authority. Children cannot throw off educational authority as though they were in a position of oppression by an adult majority—though even this absurdity of treating children as an oppressed minority in need of liberation has actually been tried out in modern educational practice. Authority has been discarded by the adults, and this can mean only one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children.

There is of course a connection between the loss of authority in public and political life and in the private pre-political realms of the family and the school. The more radical the distrust of authority becomes in the public sphere, the greater the probability naturally becomes that the private sphere will not remain inviolate. There is this additional fact, and it is very likely the decisive one, that from time out of mind we have been accustomed in our tradition of political thought to regard the authority of parents over children, of teachers over pupils, as the model by which to understand political authority. It is just this model, which can be found as early as Plato and Aristotle, that makes the concept of authority in politics so extraordinarily ambiguous. It is based, first of all, on an absolute superiority such as can never exist among adults and which, from the point of view of human dignity, must never exist. In the second place, following the model of the nursery, it is based on a purely temporary superiority and therefore becomes self-contradictory if it is applied to relations that are not

temporary by nature—such as the relations of the rulers and the ruled. Thus it lies in the nature of the matter—that is, both in the nature of the present crisis in authority and in the nature of our traditional political thought—that the loss of authority which began in the political sphere should end in the private one; and it is naturally no accident that the place where political authority was first undermined, that is, in America, should be the place where the modern crisis in education makes itself most strongly felt.

The general loss of authority could, in fact, hardly find more radical expression than by its intrusion into the pre-political sphere, where authority seemed dictated by nature itself and independent of all historical changes and political conditions. On the other hand, modern man could find no clearer expression for his dissatisfaction with the world, for his disgust with things as they are, than by his refusal to assume, in respect to his children, responsibility for all this. It is as though parents daily said: “In this world even we are not very securely at home; how to move about in it, what to know, what skills to master, are mysteries to us too. You must try to make out as best you can; in any case you are not entitled to call us to account. We are innocent, we wash our hands of you.”

This attitude has, of course, nothing to do with that revolutionary desire for a new order in the world—*Novus Ordo Seclorum*—which once animated America; it is rather a symptom of that modern estrangement from the world which can be seen everywhere but which presents itself in especially radical and desperate form under the conditions of a mass society. It is true that modern educational experiments, not in America alone, have struck very revolutionary poses, and this has, to a certain degree, increased the difficulty of clearly recognizing the situation and caused a certain degree of confusion in the discussion of the problem; for in contradiction to all such behavior stands the unquestionable fact that so long as America was really animated by that spirit she never dreamed of initiating the new order with education but, on the contrary, remained conservative in educational matters.

To avoid misunderstanding: it seems to me that conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something—the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new. Even the comprehensive responsibility for the world that is thereby assumed implies, of course, a conservative attitude. But this holds good only for the realm of education, or rather for the relations between grown-ups and children, and not for the realm of politics, where we act among and with adults and equals. In politics this conservative attitude—which accepts the world as it is, striving only

to preserve the status quo—can only lead to destruction, because the world, in gross and in detail, is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time unless human beings are determined to intervene, to alter, to create what is new. Hamlet's words, "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right," are more or less true for every new generation, although since the beginning of our century they have perhaps acquired a more persuasive validity than before.

Basically we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction.

IV

The real difficulty in modern education lies in the fact that, despite all the fashionable talk about a new conservatism, even that minimum of conservation and the conserving attitude without which education is simply not possible is in our time extraordinarily hard to achieve. There are very good reasons for this. The crisis of authority in education is most closely connected with the crisis of tradition, that is with the crisis in our attitude toward the realm of the past. This aspect of the modern crisis is especially hard for the educator to bear, because it is his task to mediate between the old and the new, so that his very profession requires of him an extraordinary respect for the past. Through long centuries, i.e., throughout the combined period of Roman-Christian civilization, there was no need for him to become aware of this special quality in himself because reverence for the past was an essential part of the Roman frame of mind, and this was not altered or ended by Christianity, but simply shifted onto different

foundations.

It was of the essence of the Roman attitude (though this was by no means true of every civilization or even of the Western tradition taken as a whole) to consider the past *qua* past as a model, ancestors, in every instance, as guiding examples for their descendants; to believe that all greatness lies in what has been, and therefore that the most fitting human age is old age, the man grown old, who, because he is already almost an ancestor, may serve as a model for the living. All this stands in contradiction not only to our world and to the modern age from the Renaissance on, but, for example, to the Greek attitude toward life as well. When Goethe said that growing old is “the gradual withdrawal from the world of appearances,” his was a comment made in the spirit of the Greeks, for whom being and appearing coincide. The Roman attitude would have been that precisely in growing old and slowly disappearing from the community of mortals man reaches his most characteristic form of being, even though, in respect to the world of appearances, he is in the process of disappearing; for only now can he approach the existence in which he will be an authority for others.

With the undisturbed background of such a tradition, in which education has a political function (and this was a unique case), it is in fact comparatively easy to do the right thing in matters of education without even pausing to consider what one is really doing, so completely is the specific ethos of the educational principle in accord with the basic ethical and moral convictions of society at large. To educate, in the words of Polybius, was simply “to let you see that you are altogether worthy of your ancestors,” and in this business the educator could be a “fellow-contestant” and a “fellow-workman” because he too, though on a different level, went through life with his eyes glued to the past. Fellowship and authority were in this case indeed but the two sides of the same matter, and the teacher’s authority was firmly grounded in the encompassing authority of the past as such. Today, however, we are no longer in that position; and it makes little sense to act as though we still were and had only, as it were, accidentally strayed from the right path and were free at any moment to find our way back to it. This means that wherever the crisis has occurred in the modern world, one cannot simply go on nor yet simply turn back. Such a reversal will never bring us anywhere except to the same situation out of which the crisis has just arisen. The return would simply be a repeat performance—though perhaps different in form, since there are no limits to the possibilities of nonsense and capricious notions that can be decked out as the last word in science. On the other hand, simple, unreflective perseverance, whether it be pressing forward in the crisis or adhering to the routine that blandly believes the crisis will not engulf its particular sphere of life, can only, because it surrenders to the course of time,

lead to ruin; it can only, to be more precise, increase that estrangement from the world by which we are already threatened on all sides. Consideration of the principles of education must take into account this process of estrangement from the world; it can even admit that we are here presumably confronted by an automatic process, provided only that it does not forget that it lies within the power of human thought and action to interrupt and arrest such processes.

The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition. That means, however, that not just teachers and educators, but all of us, insofar as we live in one world together with our children and with young people, must take toward them an attitude radically different from the one we take toward one another. We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to apply to it alone a concept of authority and an attitude toward the past which are appropriate to it but have no general validity and must not claim a general validity in the world of grown-ups.

In practice the first consequence of this would be a clear understanding that the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living. Since the world is old, always older than they themselves, learning inevitably turns toward the past, no matter how much living will spend itself in the present. Second, the line drawn between children and adults should signify that one can neither educate adults nor treat children as though they were grown up; but this line should never be permitted to grow into a wall separating children from the adult community as though they were not living in the same world and as though childhood were an autonomous human state, capable of living by its own laws. Where the line between childhood and adulthood falls in each instance cannot be determined by a general rule; it changes often, in respect to age, from country to country, from one civilization to another, and also from individual to individual. But education, as distinguished from learning, must have a predictable end. In our civilization this end probably coincides with graduation from college rather than with graduation from high school, for the professional training in universities or technical schools, though it always has something to do with education, is nevertheless in itself a kind of specialization. It no longer aims to introduce the young person to the world as a whole, but rather to a particular, limited segment of it. One cannot educate without at the same time teaching; an education without learning is empty and therefore degenerates with great ease into moral-emotional rhetoric. But one can quite easily teach without educating, and one can go on learning to the end of

one's days without for that reason becoming educated. All these are particulars, however, that must really be left to the experts and the pedagogues.

What concerns us all and cannot therefore be turned over to the special science of pedagogy is the relation between grown-ups and children in general or, putting it in even more general and exact terms, our attitude toward the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth. Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.