

PSYCHIC SELF-REPROACH

From Remorse to Realization



LECTURES ON PERSONAL GROWTH

Manly P. Hall



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ISBN 0-89314-344-8

(2007 Edition)

Published by

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

3910 Los Feliz Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90027 USA

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Printed in the United States of America

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FROM REMORSE TO REALIZATION

(from a lecture originally delivered at PRS in November, 1960)

Remorse is probably one of the most common emotions in the human being, and yet, it is one that demands a heavy psychological penalty. Sometimes the penalty may be justified, but in many cases, those who suffer most have the least in real offense, while the chronic offenders often do not seem to suffer at all. It may be of value, therefore, to study some of the psychological factors that may cause us to develop essentially negative, though perhaps unjustified, patterns of emotion or thought, for such patterns can, and often do, burden us for an entire lifetime.

First of all, let us consider the point that good and evil, right and wrong, are highly relative terms. We know, from the standpoint of internal conscience, that certain basic ethical-moral values are important. Therefore, we do have a kind of moral code that arises from experience, from the deepest internal convictions of the individual, and from long-tested factual relationships to the conditions around us in life. These, however, are not the elements that often contribute to a remorse psychology. When man-made interpretations of natural truths become more important than these truths themselves, and we build various attitudes around these interpretations, it is these attitudes that we should fully examine.

Remorse is not natural to the individual unless he is reasonably convinced that he has committed a serious offense, but the nature and degree of this offense in the conscience of the

individual depends upon his own code of right and wrong. It becomes important, therefore, to examine this code.

One source of a standard of ethics or integrity is tradition. When we do something that is traditionally different from the way of our kind, we are apt to feel, ultimately, that we have transgressed in some way. It may well happen that the way of our kind is not in all things good, but we have given it a broad acceptance, and because of this acceptance, we punish ourselves for an action that is perhaps essentially good, but is contrary to the tradition in which we have been trained or raised.

I remember, for instance, a serious case of conscience-mechanism that developed in a devout member of a rather conservative religious group as a result of his decision to take up ballroom dancing. Now, ballroom dancing may be fatiguing, but it is not essentially evil, and certainly the individual who feels that dancing is a social asset will be joined by millions of others who feel the same way. In the creed of this particular group, however, dancing was considered a frivolous, worldly activity, and this group did not believe in catering to worldliness in any form.

Yet this person had a strong desire to be socially successful; he wanted to be an accomplished dancer. He therefore did what he wanted to do—which most people ultimately will do—and then began to regret it; and this regret led to a series of complications, including a marked repentance and a growing suspicion that he had endangered his eternal salvation.

To those of other beliefs such an episode is little more than ridiculous, but to the person who accepts such a code, it can be a serious problem. This has caused a number of psychologists, who have not been particularly anxious to handle the religious equation—in which they find themselves rather out of their depth anyway—to take the attitude that the individual is generally happier if he does not violate those creedal or sectarian convictions which he has accepted to be true. This is especially

the case if a person, in a moment of great religious intensity, makes solemn obligations to himself not to do certain things. If he then does these things, he is apt to develop a conscience-mechanism which, although it cannot be rationalized, can be the cause of serious suffering.

In some way, particularly in Western culture, man has associated his religious convictions with a rather melancholy state of his own nature. Essentially, Western religion looks with extreme suspicion upon happiness. It takes the attitude that the individual who is happy here is laying the foundation for future misery; that our real duty here is to spend our lives attempting to atone for primordial or original sin. Thus, in many religions, the individual, in early life, is subjected to fear. He is indoctrinated with the idea that he is surrounded by a Divine Providence that is hasty to punish and reluctant to understand him in matters of the frailties of the flesh. A person raised in a religion that is founded in fear, which seeks to hold its constituency by frightening it into a state of religious conformity, often has difficulties later in life. If he is taught from the beginning that the most natural and common instincts of his life are wrong, he begins to develop a sense of the imminence of evil, an uneasy feeling that his own nature is endangered, that he is a sinner, and that he was truly "born in sin and conceived in iniquity." Thus, if religion causes us to be more fearful than grateful, if it causes us to view God as a despot rather than a benevolent parent, if it denies to Deity the common understanding of simple problems of humanity, we are very likely to become more and more convinced of the sinfulness of almost everything that we think or do.

This type of religion, I think, has strongly influenced most psychologists in their thinking. They realize that it is wrong, and that it is working a serious and perhaps tragic evil in the lives of ordinary people. In order to dispose of the trouble, therefore, they are inclined to turn against the whole concept of religion.

Actually, many persons carry their religions with dignity, but a great deal of religion, even in the most conservative groups, is a matter of interpretation. We do not have to punish ourselves, but often we do not have sufficient internal maturity to interpret our faiths in a constructive and sensible manner. Perhaps we gain this as we go through life, but in our early years—the most impressionable period of living—we are not up to this emergency.

If, then, we develop this habit of considering everything natural as being wrong, we are in trouble, because we are natural creatures. We are not so constituted that we can consistently maintain a supernatural state of ourselves. We cannot be above the ordinary needs and problems of life; we cannot live within a narrow, puritanical framework throughout the entire course of our years. It is not wise, therefore, for us to be forced continuously to doubt the moral value of simple human action, for if we do, we will never know when and where to draw the line.

Another problem that can also contribute to remorse psychology is a certain type of family background. Fifty years ago, family life could be extremely severe, and there are very few older persons who cannot remember phases of this severity. The individual had to live under a very strict sense of obedience. He had to agree with parents, even if he knew they were wrong, and any effort to be himself might be regarded as insubordination. He was supposed to obey his parents in all things, and very often he rose in righteous indignation against this domination. If he did this, he was reproached, criticized, and condemned until his moral background was seriously undermined. Thus the effort to force conformity upon young people in family life became, in the last century, oppressive in the extreme, and this “sin” of difference has caused many persons to be miserable through the years.

Parents sometimes impose unreasonable obligations upon children, which in turn may cause a serious difficulty to arise.

Not long ago, a case of this kind came directly to my attention. A parent, on his deathbed, had required that a child take an obligation to support another child who was by nature delinquent. This created a deep sense of responsibility, and the child grew up devoting most of his life to the thankless task of catering to the selfishness, indifference, and actual depravity of the sibling. To have resisted would have resulted in a serious conflict in that person, because he had taken this obligation.

As time went on, it became obvious that the obligation was unreasonable; that it was really doing harm rather than good. Finally, the person rebelled, but he also developed a serious guilt mechanism. He was unable to escape from this deathbed promise, even though the promise itself was certainly cruelly forced, and was without any real justification or merit.

Thus, all kinds of conditions can arise that may cause an individual to develop certain unreasonable remorse complexes, creating personality pressures and tensions relating to conduct. This often leads to a continuous process of self-punishment. The remorse may be locked so deeply within the subconscious of the person that he no longer recognizes it as a factor in his thought or emotions. Many individuals are continually punishing themselves for real or imaginary ills, and there is also the type of person who seems to take a certain subconscious pleasure in believing that he is a sinner.

Actually, no one in his natural and proper state feels that he is born to suffer; but the tendency toward this neurosis can exist even in small children. It is useless to say that the child has no disposition of its own. Many children are born with a hypersensitivity, and problems that are passed over lightly by other children make a deep and lasting impression on the sensitive child. This child nurses hurts, and this process, continued over a long period of time, unbalances the natural optimism and leads the person to feel that in some way he is in the world to suffer.

Unfortunately, religion does not help much in this respect, because it more or less morally implies that the individual is here to suffer, and that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” This brings up a question, but very few people ever answer it clearly. If it is true that the Lord chastens those whom he loves, it may be by implication that the most miserable of people are his favorites. This does not, however, always prove to be true; the mere fact that we are uncomfortable is no proof that Deity is particularly near to us.

It may well be that we are being chastened for our own actions, and not necessarily because we are here to suffer. Most persons, however, do not like to assume the responsibility for their own conduct. Therefore, if it can be proved to their own satisfaction that they are the victims of original sin or something of that nature, it helps to provide a whitewash for present conduct. It is sometimes easier to assume that we are destined to suffer than that we deserve to suffer; and there is a world of difference between these two things.

In philosophy, destiny and desserts are closely related, but in theology they are not so obviously related. It is quite possible to assume, in most theologies, that an individual can suffer from evils which he has not caused, or can be punished for circumstances for which he is not personally responsible. This type of thinking is represented by the general statement that we are all sinners; and this often leads to a melancholy reaction to the entire problem of living. Thus, the super-sensitive, hyper-tense child easily becomes unadjusted, and gradually develops into the adult who is convinced that it is a moral duty for the world to be as unhappy as he is. To this sorrowing soul, anyone who is gay and optimistic is simply stupid. Any individual who finds enjoyment in the world of misery, is mad.

Actually, the problem of this world being a world of misery is rather a moot question. Surveys over a period of time indicate that, even considering crime, war, pestilence, and rise and

fall of empires, economic pressures and situations, the greater majority of human beings are comparatively happy, contented, and are actually doing what they want to do. They are not a miserable lot.

Peace of mind and peace of soul result very largely from the individual's living in his own way and doing those things which he regards a proper, pleasant, and purposeful at the moment. The majority of persons accept this, and the individual who does not have such acceptances is placing his life under an unusual strain.

If a person subconsciously comes to the conviction that either as the result of personal conduct, or because of the taboos that frame traditional patterns of living, he is a sinner, or has committed some real and serious ill, then he instinctively goes into a series of complex negative attitudes. First, fear may introduce itself. The lawbreaker is afraid of the law he has broken, and according to his interpretation of this law, his fears may be greater or lesser.

Occasionally we find a criminal who commits a crime with a full recognition of the penalty he is likely to receive, and yet, having estimated the circumstances, takes the chance and accepts the penalty if he is caught; this is a kind of calculated risk. Where religious and moral issues are involved, however, calculated risk is very difficult, because it is one thing to be punished by laws we can understand, and another thing to come under the adverse attitudes of a Deity we do not understand.

Nearly always, therefore, sins against our faiths are more important to us psychologically than crimes against the state. The person does not have any adequate way of estimating the consequences of his sin in moral terms. If, therefore, he feels that he is particularly burdened by his wrong actions, he is likely to panic; and this panic within himself is not always consciously estimated as such, but manifests as a pattern that we find all

too frequently, in which there is a profoundly negative attitude on almost everything.

We find, for instance, persons who are suffering from persecution mechanisms of one kind or another. Every few days, we get letters from persons who think there are things we should really immediately know. Nearly all of these letters contain either literature or carefully worked out statements of terrible ills that are threatening us—various institutions upon which we depend are corrupt; racial groups are determined to undermine civilization; it is only a matter of time before Western civilization will collapse as a result of some terrible conspiracy against our way of life. To these persons, good news is never important; it is never reported. They live continually on the ragged edge of disaster, and this disaster is usually too big for them—something they cannot hope to cope with, something that closes in upon them.

This type of over-emphasis can become habitual, but only in the lives of persons who are themselves unadjusted. It is not natural for man to live in fear of life, any more that it is natural for him to live in fear of death. The healthy and normal state of man is a reasonable degree of optimism in which he is aware, perhaps, that there are critical situations, but underneath all the pressures of the time, there is a certain self-security. There is a basic optimism about life, a sense that each person has within himself the potential of good living, of right living; that he is not a victim of society; that he does not have to fall apart because his world does.

The individual who believes that everything is wrong is apt to be punishing himself for a sense of deadly sin locked in his own internal life. Perhaps he has made a failure of personal living, has married badly, has neglected his children, has lost the confidence of his friends, and has been impractical economically. Thus seeing himself in a sequence of disasters, he is inclined to assume that life is against him.

Actually, such disasters nearly always arise from a basically wrong mental foundation. The individual has become morbid, negative, self-pitying, or self-punishing. Of course, we cannot be totally optimistic about things that are obviously not right, but we can have, beneath our doubts and worries, a certain strong sense of the value of right, of the inevitable victory of right, and the fact that this universe is ruled over by divine principles and divine laws, and that it is not going to be permitted to destroy itself.

Unless some of these basic values are strong enough to carry us through the doubts of the day with a reasonable degree of optimism, there is something wrong in our own equipment, and we must begin to look for the fear factors—fear of self, fear of others, fear of life. When we begin to recognize the rise of hyper-criticism, the inevitable tendency to see something wrong in others, it is usually an indication that we have transformed this world into a kind of inferno for the punishment of ourselves. We are attempting to justify a number of negative factors on the ground that they are God's Will, and this form of God's Will is to punish us, and others like us, for the mere fact that we exist.

To summarize this phase of our discussion, then, I would say that wrong indoctrination causes the individual to have a false relationship with life; causes life to become an oppression rather than an opportunity. The wrong interpretation of religion may force the individual into a desperate determination to reform life, a situation that can then lead to a whole series of moral consequences in terms of frustrations or disappointments. The individual comes to have certain bitter self-reproach, remorse, self-criticism, and even condemnation simply because he is not able to do things which are, by substance, almost impossible.

In actual fact, the person is only limited by the same limitations that we all have, and he has no right to feel he is any worse

than anyone else, but many people do repent the wrong things. They repent the fact that they are not super-human, when in reality they should be repenting the fact that they have not practiced just old-fashioned human kindness. That is the problem. We feel sometimes that our destiny is bigger than our capacity to meet it, and if we have placed ourselves in an impossible situation, through egotism or through false valuation, we may then blame ourselves because we cannot achieve the impossible.

So guilt feelings mount on the most irrational and irresponsible foundations, and the very things for which we should blame ourselves, we overlook. Going out to save the world, we forget to take care of our own bad temper, suspiciousness, and jealousy, and those common faults that we might have been able to remedy. Thus, false perspectives cause us to criticize ourselves for imagining faults that we may not possess, and to blissfully ignore ordinary and common faults that we do possess.

Having covered a few of these general remorse factors, let us now imagine an individual who is remorseful about some factual things that he has done. One important point, which is brought out clearly in Zen, is that the individual should not regard himself, as he very often does, as a continuous state of consciousness that is always the same but is always doing something different. The individual, looking back twenty years, thinks of himself as being what he is now, only twenty years ago. With his present experience, his present maturity (or lack of it), he then passes judgement, with the assumption that the person twenty years ago had the same values and perspective that he has today.

This is essentially false. Zen points out that instead of this continuously flowing identity, the individual is a perceptual series of focal points. The person who lived twenty years ago does not exist now, because in order to be that person, he would have to think exactly as he thought twenty years ago, be placed in precisely the same situation, and the world in which he lives would

have to be exactly the same as it was then, because it was as result of the stimuli of circumstances that he reacted as he did.

Thus, to pass judgment upon ourselves for some other date than now opens a rather serious difficulty. It causes us, perhaps, to wish we had done differently; yet at the same time, we did these things with a good spirit. Perhaps we even realized that we were doing wrong, but it was a calculated risk at that time; it was what we believed to a natural compromise for some end we desired to achieve then. Now, after a period of many years, we look back upon those events and see that our judgment was bad. We see that we did things that hurt us, and perhaps are continuing to hurt us. Therefore, we feel a sense of repentance. We would like to right these wrongs; we would like to do something about them.

Very often, of course, after a long period of time, there is nothing we really can do of a practical nature. Perhaps the persons with whom we had difficulties have long since departed from this world, or we have lost track of them; or perhaps the situation that we set up was later broken again, and the elements of it are so scattered that there is nothing we can do about it. But still, we say to ourselves, "If I had those years to live over again, I would live them differently."

If a person looking back does not say this, there is something wrong with him. If he can look back ten years, twenty years, even five years, and cannot say now that he could have done better, then growth has accomplished nothing for him. It is presumed that, by the natural laws of nature, an individual can answer a question better after twenty years of study than he can after one month of study. He might have graduated with greater honors from kindergarten if at the time he graduated from college, he had been able to take the kindergarten examination. If we could not see, from the maturity of our lives, how we could have lived our adolescence more advantageously, we would be pretty stupid

people; but at the time we lived those years of doubt, we lived them according to what we were.

It is a great mistake, therefore, to live in continual repentance of our past, because this past belongs to a person who does not exist any longer. Perhaps it belongs to a very imaginative, romantic, even hysterical individual, who passed out of the picture in the middle teens. We have the same name and birth record, but we are no longer that person, for we are now on a different level, with greater maturity and greater reason for the decisions we make.

This process of trying to impose our present judgment on our own previous actions is just as wrong as attempting to impose our personal judgment upon someone else's present action. So if, in the course of things, we have made natural and common mistakes that have been hard to remedy, or which, perhaps, have burdened us with fear, we must face ourselves and realize that we have grown; we have even benefited from the very mistakes that are causing us the greatest concern.

It is natural that children should not be as provident as adults, or that adolescents should not be as well integrated intellectually as mature individuals. In various periods of life, under the pressures of times and circumstances, we may have done things that we are not too proud of as we look back upon them; but at this moment, we are also doing things that we may not be proud of ten years from now.

This does not mean that we should be relieved of all concern about making mistakes, but it does mean that we should approach our mistakes not with a sense of fear or of severe judgment, but with a simple sense of self-improvement. What have we learned from our actions? How have we grown as a result of things that have happened to us? I think the only real cause for repentance would be if we could honestly say that we have not grown. If, in looking back over these other episodes, we should

find that we would do the same thing again now, there would be cause for a certain amount of alarm. But to sit back in an ivory tower today, and penalize ourselves for what we did in our earlier years, is neither profitable nor helpful.

Actually, for the most part, nature tells us what we should do, but we have become so involved in man-made speculations that we do not allow nature to have its way. The correct attitudes, under any and all conditions, are those that enrich us now, helping to preserve our health, and giving us the courage and integrity with which to move into tomorrow as resourcefully as possible.

If we discover that remorse over past actions makes us sick now—either psychologically or physically—then that is not the attitude nature wants us to take. Nature wants us to be well, and attitudes that make us anti-social, or make it impossible for us to live in a cooperative way with those around us, cost us the respect and admiration of our children and our friends—such attitudes cannot be the correct solutions to any problem. Our attitudes must be basically constructive in their consequences.

Thus, if we are remorseful about one situation, and in this remorse, live miserably and make others unhappy now, then we are not paying a debt, but compounding an injury. We are suffering from the delusion that two wrongs can make a right. Whatever may be the situation that might cause us to have regret or remorse, the correct solution must be one that restores optimism, values, self-confidence, and moral determination to go on and grow.

All this might seem as though we were advising individuals merely to excuse themselves for their past mistakes, and go cheerfully on making fresher and bigger ones. This is not our intention. The idea is not that we should excuse a mistake, but that we should recognize that every mistake has within itself its own punishment. “Vengeance is mine saith the Lord. I will

repay." I have often used that sentence, but slurred it slightly and instead of the word "Lord," substituted the word "Law." "Vengeance is mine saith the *Law*. I will repay."

The Law, in this case, means that every action has within itself its own compensation. Whatever we do results in something, and that something, good or bad, is the reward or punishment of that action. It is utter impossible for any individual to successfully evade the consequences of his own conduct, and the person who is remorseful now can also look back upon a series of circumstances that focused his remorse. He did something wrong and things began to go badly. There more he struggled and fussed with the situation, the worse it became, so that by the time a strong remorse aspect had fashioned itself in his conscience, he had already paid for the mistake. He paid for it out of his own inevitable, immediate consequences.

There is no possibility, therefore, of evading a mistake, and honest persons have no particular desire for evasion. If, out of natural and honest ignorance, we do something wrong, and find that we have broken a rule of nature, we take the punishment as indicative of the fact; and having learned from experience about this particular situation, we try not to repeat it. Each problem has its own rules, and if we reject these rules, or fight against them, we will be forced, in due course, to admit the fact that we were wrong; we will have to live with the consequences of our mistakes until we stop making them.

This, however, is not a disaster, for nature does not punish many times for one offense. If a person made a slight error thirty years ago, nature does not compound the punishment and determine to make the individual miserable for the rest of his life. The natural spans of compensation are reasonable and proper.

If, therefore, a person is suffering from a relatively small mistake, made many years ago, it is not the error he is suffering from, nor the natural punishment, but a false psychological situation

that he has set up in himself. He has magnified something out of all proportion to its reasonable dimensions, and is suffering from his own imagination and his own morbid determination to perpetuate a comparatively unimportant situation.

We might say, then, that if we commit an ill, we should pay for it at once, and nature will make sure that we do. We can tell a lie that we hope to get away with, but within a few days, we are up to our necks in the consequences of that lie, and before we are even able to smooth over the troubled surface, we have paid for it. But to remember this problem in the sense that it is a continual unfinished business to build upon, to fear, to worry about, thus causing us to repeat the incident again and again in ourselves, is simply lack of self-discipline. It is deliberately hurting ourselves, and in order to have the temperament to do this, there has to be a basic fault in ourselves. This fault, by which we want to continue to punish ourselves, usually arises in a concept of religious sin—a concept that we have perhaps consciously rejected, but which subconsciously lives on and demands that we continue to suffer many times for one mistake.

This brings us to the final issue that we always have to face with these things, and that is—how are we going to handle them now? Obviously, whatever we have done, we cannot undo. The egg that has been broken will never be put together again, no matter how hard we try. So the question arises—how can we make up for a mistake we have made, so that we can right the wrong and restore our peace of mind about it? Here we must pause and consider the concept of the forgiveness of sin. There are two theories behind this concept: by the one, pardon is the result of “divine grace”; and by the other, forgiveness is attained through penance.

In the doctrine of “grace,” the individual admits his mistake, and prayerfully and with contrition, assumes the resolution not to make this mistake again. Thus he may plead or pray for

spiritual release from the consequences of this mistake, and ask for the forgiveness of sin. This type of attitude is the one most commonly called religious, and many persons find in this a complete consolation. If they can convince themselves that they have received this forgiveness as the result of some mystical experience in their own natures, by which some change in their own psychic reaction causes them to know inwardly that the slate has been wiped clean, then this brings with it the same type of catharsis as is associated with penance.

Penance was the ancient way of atonement, in which the individual performed some action to compensate for the action he regretted. The intensity and moral value of this action had to be such as to balance or outweigh the wrong committed. The old concept of penance goes back so very far in the spiritual experience of man, that it would seem there must be some foundation and justification for it. I think the essential principle of justification lies in the concept that penance is not only the acceptance of the fact of the error, but represents the individual disciplining himself for some action over which the courts cannot exercise authority. By penalizing himself in the proportion of his offense, he achieves personal self-satisfaction. By performing the action of his penance, he feels that he has compensated for what he has done wrong.

Penance may take several forms. In the oldest laws, it was related as closely as possible to the original offense. In the ancient code of Hammurabi, for example, if you stole from your neighbor, your neighbor was then entitled to reclaim his goods with a certain penalty which you had to pay him. If you performed a certain ill against him, he had certain rights and privileges of redress. If a person had injured another, penance might mean that he should go to that other person, acknowledge his fault, and make whatever retribution was possible.

In our way of life, for most persons, penance arises in a situation where it is no longer possible to relate punishment to the

exact offense. Repentance comes at a time so far removed from the original episode that it is impossible to go to the persons who were hurt or to rearrange the elements and restore the situation to its original condition. Therefore, the penance must be an abstract form of compensation.

Psychology recognizes this also. It realizes the value, for example, of open confession, where the individual unburdens his secret—for remorse is very often a secret. He has something locked within himself of which he is ashamed. It may be important for him to communicate this to another person whom he can trust, in order that this secrecy, which is a terrible pressure of negation in his life, shall be removed.

We often find, therefore, that the individual can relieve himself of the guilt mechanisms that have troubled him through conferences on a psychological level. Perhaps the analyst is able to point out that his entire problem is rather imaginary and he has injured himself un-necessarily. If he has confidence in the analyst and will accept this, he frees himself from these pressures. Or perhaps he gains advice as to how to right a wrong as far as possible and thus gain certain consolation.

One of the best ways of approaching any mistake that has resulted in sorrow to other persons, or a loss of value in the life of the individual, is to realize that in human society, it probably will occur that we cannot make compensation to the particular person whom we injured. If it were possible, this would be the best thing to do, but if it is impossible, we must not feel that we are locked with our error simply because we cannot rearrange the original pattern. We can perform penance in the name of our mistake, and to the philosophically minded, this means an action of compensatory merit.

If, therefore, we feel that others have been deprived of happiness by some action of ours, then it becomes our duty to bestow happiness equal to that which we feel we have taken from another. A great many fortunes in this country have suffered from

conscience trouble, because so often great wealth is accomplished by ruthless action, and after it has been achieved, and the high pressures and excitement of competition have waned a little, these wealthy persons begin to feel the need to compensate. So one will build a clinic, another will build a hospital, someone else will endow an orphanage. Nearly always, the individual tries to compensate. It is instinctive.

These spectacular happenings do not often apply to the average person. Yet it is safe to say that no one reaches maturity without at least the realization that there are things he could have done better. It is very common to have doubts or fears that have arisen from reasonably secure but borderline decisions.

There are cases where we must make decisions that apparently will hurt someone. The divided family, for example—is it going to stay together and perhaps put the children between two arguing parents, or is it better to break up the situation and have one parent take the children and bring them up in a comparatively cooperative way? What is the right decision? And on through life, many decisions are so involved that the average person, and even expert counsel, cannot be certain that there will not be some complicated and confused consequences.

The average individual can look back upon such decisions as these, which he has had to make according to the best that he knew, and he may realize that this best was not good enough. What is he going to do about these things? Finding out afterwards that situations resulted from these decisions that brought pain and sorrow to others, he is naturally and reasonably sorry.

How is he to face these problems in his own life? I think the answer lies in the fact, as we mentioned before, that whether we know it or not, we have already faced them. Any event that occurred several years ago has already been faced, and we have paid the bill, so to speak, through our sorrow and through the

decisions we subsequently had to make. In breaking up a certain patten, we may have hurt someone, but we also brought sorrow or trouble to ourselves. By the time we think these things through, we will generally find that if our intentions were reasonable and our motives at the same time were good, our compensations are fairly well balanced.

If, however, we observe in our contemplations that we are still living to exploit ulterior motives; if the things we are doing now are essentially for selfish reasons; if we are trying to gain rather than to give; and if we are exploiting the rights of others, or using legal technicalities as a means of doing things that are essentially not right—then we are facing not some old problem, but the fact that we are daily and in every way compromising the principles of nature itself.

If, therefore, at any given time, we do not have a clear conscience, if we are not able to honestly feel that the situations under which we are living are ethically sound, then the only answer is to correct the situations as quickly as possible, and not permit selfishness to over-influence this correction. We cannot afford to merely maintain comfort or some kind of security at the expense of principles, for some day we are going to have to face those principles.

Thus, if we are making mistakes now, and we are unhappy, cause and effect are operating smoothly. They are doing exactly what nature intended them to do—compensate. When we decide to stop doing what is wrong, then our fears, worries, and doubts will also lighten and finally cease. Nature will not punish many times for one offense, but neither will it relieve us if we continue to commit the same offense.

We know that in the field of crime, for example, when the criminal breaks the law of his community, he breaks a pattern of mutual protection set up by experience to preserve the common good. We may ridicule some laws, considering them excessive

or improperly applied, but behind and beneath all impropriety in these matters, our basic codes, which have come down to us from Hammurabi and Justinian, are for the common good of man.

The criminal, breaking these codes, brings upon himself a state of isolation. He becomes one against his community, thereby depriving himself of many common advantages and placing his life in a state of perpetual hazard. He is in continual internal distress because he knows that he possesses a guilty secret, and a person with a guilty secret is always sick.

Thus, in the case of man-made law, the compensation for law-breaking is a cutting off, or separation from the common securities, as well as from the common good opinion of the community. This is usually accompanied by a continually increasing fear, which frequently reaches such a degree that a criminal himself can no longer endure it and will confess his crime to get the burden of it off his conscience.

Wherever we break the law, either in conduct or in emotion, we create a negative interval between ourselves and the common life of our kind. We do not outgrow; we merely violently break the bonds by means of which our community life is held together.

It is one thing for a person to outgrow the negative aspects of a culture, but it is quite another thing for him to violently break his relationship with society without either the strength or the serenity of consciousness to live constructively with his sense of isolation. If he is better than his world, he gains certain consolation from his own internal improvement, and this gives him the strength with which to face disapproval or even persecution; but if he is different without being better, he has no further resource in himself and no means of maintaining his isolation in an honorable or constructive manner.

In psychological thinking, we come very close to this problem of the law of consequence, and one thing that psychology

recognizes in nearly all its researches, is the importance of discovering the cause of the psychosis or the frustration or the neurosis from which the individual suffers. There is no question whatever in the mind of the scientist today that there must be a cause. An effect cannot stand alone, but must descend from a series of previous circumstances suitable to justify it.

Practically all science is based upon the acceptance, whether spoken or unspoken, of a patter of causes and effects, each one having a bearing upon the great cycle of human life. The scientist may or may not moralize upon cause and effect. In his thinking, on a psychological level, he knows that the sick person is sick for some reason, but he may or may not affirm that the individual is responsible for his own sickness.

The physician, dealing with phenomena primarily, and not inclined necessarily to bring philosophy to bear upon them, may be convinced that the causes which have created the difficulty are beyond the control of the sufferer. Therefore, he may feel that the victim is really suffering from causes that are clearly obvious, but the moral relationship of these causes to the nature of the sufferer may not always be obvious.

Thus, the scientist, assuming the importance of heredity and environment, uses these as substitutes for personal responsibility. From first appearance, he seems to have a very good cause, inasmuch as it is difficult to imagine how a very small child, under a certain environmental pressure, can be held responsible for the broken home in which it finds itself, or for the social conditions and situations arising in the world around it.

The scientist is therefore inclined to suspect an amoral basis behind a great deal of this chain of causes and effects. He is then, however, at a certain disadvantage. He recognizes a law, he knows that cause and effect operate, yet he is not quite certain whether he can consider this law as moral or possessing any ethical significance. He is inclined, rather, to consider it

mechanical and inevitable, like the rising and the setting of the sun—something to which man must eternally adjust himself, but about which he can do very little as far as basic changes or modifications are concerned.

It is hard to argue with him at this particular point; yet something has to be wrong with this picture. The trouble is that if we see a universe which is an unfoldment of many-splendored rules and laws and principles, it is difficult to see man completely enmeshed in these laws, fulfilling them in every respect that is observable or knowable to us, and at the same time, have these laws unable to control their own causational factors. Man is then a victim of accident—an exception to law in this particular—while actually completely immersed in immutable Law. Everywhere motion is moral, but in his life, motion is amoral, seemingly arising from causes beyond his control.

If we hold that an individual must bear the consequences of a situation, the cause of which does not arise in himself or is not in some way directly due to his own conduct, then we have attacked the entire fabric of Law. The moment we have an explanation, we have not attacked merely one fragment, but the total concept of Law collapses. Everything is then possible; every dishonesty, every inconsistency, every inadequacy is possible if any inadequacy or any inconsistency exists.

The great question that arise out of this dilemma is that we must accept, out of our own experience, one of two points of view. The one is that Law has exception; therefore, technically, Law has no existence. The second possibility is that Law has no exception, but that human faculties, human powers, human sensory reactions are so limited, that man is unable to determine certain levels of causation. The cause exists, but man has not discovered it. The individual's search for Law, in order that he may conduct himself according to right knowing, must be in the direction of the discovery of the hidden fountains or

real facts of Law which are behind the so-called dishonesty or inconsistency in living.

We live in a world of apparent injustices, in which everything seems to go wrong. Every inducement is offered, apparently, to compromise, and the individual is seemingly penalized by his very effort to live a lawful existence, because all appearances are against the application of these concepts and principles. The struggle is between the fact of the matter and the appearance of the matter, and as long as we live by appearances, we have to accept a superficial standard of life that is neither solutional nor suitable to our essential need.

The fact that we have not arrived at any of the major securities that we have sought, after having followed this procedure for thousands of years, should indicate to us that our approach is wrong. If the causes we have set in motion in the last five thousand years of history were the right causes, we would have a world of peace by now. IF, therefore, our way of life is an effect—if the situations in which we find ourselves are the consequential chemistry of causes—then the causes are wrong, or the processes we are using are wrong.

Our conduct must be wrong unless this conduct bears the harvest of the things we know to be essentially right. To discover the wrongness of our own procedure, is perhaps of no great comfort at the moment, but it does give us this recognition, by reverse thinking. If what we are doing is not producing the end we desire, then an action that is different may produce a better result.

We can recognize a certain polarity in conduct, and while this rule is not invariable or infallible, it is worth considering; namely, if a certain intensity produces a certain disaster, then virtue, peace, or security, may lie in an opposite application of energy. For example, if impatience produces nothing but fatigue, miser, and trouble, then perhaps patience should be

explored. If we find that criticism produces nothing but a series of detrimental consequences, it may be wise to curb criticism, or to recognize that it is not a desirable approach to problems. If we find, throughout the ages, that gossip and slander produce nothing but destruction, then to cease performing these peculiar procedures may produce the lack of these destructive results.

Since the misuse of energy always results in trouble, it is advisable to consider the possibility of other uses than the one which gives the trouble. While we may not be able to determine right use empirically, we can work with our problem experimentally to try to find how we can modify causes in order that effects may be more agreeable and more consistent with the common good that we visualize to be real.

I have known people who for years have been blaming the past for unhappiness, when the real cause of it is in present action. If, therefore, we have this type of thinking in our own consciousness, then it is very important to try to correct it by taking a strong hold upon the facts. This is what is meant by realization; it is man's seeing the facts, and through this, being brought ultimately to the recognition of the benevolence of the divine plan. It is through our own conduct that we can actually discover the mysterious workings of the Infinite. It is through our own relationships with life that we can discover the sovereign honesty of the cosmos in which we live. The moment we experience the universe as honest, our own honesty will increase, and we will have greater strength for right decisions.

Nature does not wish us to bring our faults out of the past to burden the present; what nature wants us to do is to draw a balance and bring forward a total in terms of growth, experience, and understanding. We pay for a mistake when, through that mistake, we learn the principles of life, so that instead of repeating the error, we will act more nobly or effectively.

From the realization that in the past we did something that resulted in penalty and remorse, we must ask ourselves—what

are we doing now? Are the things that we are doing today likely to be the cause of remorse tomorrow? Are we, out of selfishness, determination, or narrow-mindedness, dashing on to further trouble? If we are, the time to slow down and consider is now.

How do we know whether what we are doing is right or wrong? How can we be certain in our own consciousness that some habit or present conduct is incorrect? The answer is: How do we feel? Are we in reasonable adjustment? Is our life basically happy? Do we meet our problems and emergencies as skillfully as we can, and let a broad pattern of happiness take over again? Are we essentially secure? Or are we basically unhappy, with only rare moments of happiness? If at the moment our life is not essentially creative, constructive, and happy in the core of it—not in every incident, but in the basic core—if there is not a sun shining in us, then something we are doing is wrong.

If we continue to do wrong things, we will be sick. The moment we correct them, we pay the debt for our mistakes. The discovery and correction of our errors, the compensation for them to the best of our ability—these are the proper payments we must make. When, in our own consciousness, we have put these things right, we realize that we do not live in a universe of vengeance, nor one in which we are merely here to suffer.

We are here to grow. We can grow happily if we permit it and when we realize that the laws of the universe are just. It is not nature's way to give eternal punishment for one mistake. Continual and repeated punishment is simply a negative pattern of our own mind and imagination. To clear these issues in our thinking, will do a great deal toward helping us to face life and the future constructively and purposefully.

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Manly P. Hall founded the Philosophical Research Society, Inc., a non-profit organization in 1934, dedicated to the dissemination of useful knowledge in the fields of philosophy, comparative religion, and psychology. In his long career, spanning more than seventy years of dynamic public activity, Mr. Hall delivered over 8000 lectures in the United States and abroad, authored over 150 books and essays, and wrote countless magazine articles.

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