

HOW TO GROW A CHILD: After the Beginning

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After the beginning is misleading in that it presupposes we have become very aware of our desire and our questedness. Perhaps you have not and I add this because it is very difficult to appropriate our inner dynamics when we have spent our living unaware of such activity. But if you have at least acknowledged in some small way that you are desire and that you have questions and that they seek understanding you have begun and in that position-you have moved. This article takes up the discussion of how to grow a child in what might be called practical. How does one do it? The difficulty in discussing this is that it presupposes we have some self-understanding and reading the two former articles would hardly provide that. So, in some way we are still at the beginning. After 28 years of reflecting on how to grow a child I still quite often find myself feeling inadequate in my own efforts at discussing the topic or how to begin. I can say it is about cultivating the child's quest. I then realize I must cultivate my own first. Those efforts manifest my own biography and the inhibitions that may have faded my own questedness. Can we ever retrieve that dynamic state that the child expresses so freely? I suspect it would be rare to do so in our times.¹

Some years ago I was driving down the hill from my home on a cold wintry morning and ended up sitting in a line of busy traffic for a brief time. A boy about the age of 6 or so was walking along beside my car carrying his school bag. He was probably headed for school. He was dancing around in a ballerinic manner. I had no idea what he was up to or 'where' he was. But he was not on the street that I or any of the other drivers were on. As I moved along we kept pace, I watching him and he completely unaware of my presence or watching. We would say that he was in his 'own' world. And he was. We would say he was enjoying his imagination or that perhaps he was escaping from 'our' world. This experience of the child manifests not just a very creative imagination, but

¹ Philip McShane, *Pastkeynes Postmodern Economics: A Fresh Pragmatism*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2002, p. 1 Editor's Introduction for a brief reflection on our present axial period of fragmentation and the much needed goal if we are to gradually transform our disrupted subjectivity.

also perhaps just as importantly, a freedom of expression. It manifested an openness not just to the world of sensibility but also to the inner world of himself. You might say he had no fear of ‘being’ himself. He had an audience, the adult travelling-to-work group. But he did not even notice us. He was, you might say, artistically suspended. There is an authentic way of being present to experience that the child seems to embody physically, chemically, psychically and mindfully. We perhaps have a similar experience when watching a very good movie or making love. If someone taps you on the shoulder while making love, it would be shocking in that it breaks your full focus. Think of shock as something that no part of your body, psyche or mind is anticipating. If any part of you is in anticipation, shock may be reduced to surprise. There is a focussing of all that you are on some experience. You become one with the experience, you are the experience. The world of experience is you even though it appears in extroverted fashion to be beyond you.²

This is the child’s world. It is as natural for them to be the experience as it is for them to ask questions. The fragmentation of this oneness of their awareness comes soon and in different degrees depending on who grows them and how.³ You might for a moment think or recall when you experienced this ‘oneness’ of yourself. The point of this discussion is to become aware of our own dynamics and focussing. We can only come to some understanding of how to grow a child after prolonged reflection on ourselves. Unfortunately, as adults, we will notice the fragmentations that disturb our consciousness, our awareness, our focussing, and our oneness.⁴ These fragmentations make it difficult to embody or develop the oneness we had as a child. You might imagine yourself teaching children with your fragmentations and come to realize that children are in some way ahead of you. They have not yet experienced the fragmentations of living that you have so their consciousness is in some way in better shape than yours. If we shape a child into what we ‘think’ they should be, we will pass on the fragmentations in our personality, our teaching, our parenting. This is why I prefer the term ‘grow’. My image is the plant. We

² Philip McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, Exposition Press, 1975, ch. 5 on experiential objectivity.

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, CWL 3, University of Toronto Press, 1992, Ch. 7, section 8 on the longer cycle of decline.

⁴ In becoming more aware of our dynamics we may also become aware of our disturbances. To heighten consciousness is to become aware of the hidden sides of our nature, both positive and destructive.

plant a seed and we water it and feed it and expose it to sufficient sunlight. But we can do little else with the organic chemistry. The plant must find its way through the air reaching for the ‘light’. The child has chemistry that reaches for development and integration. It also has a psyche that reaches for integration and it also has a desire, a curiosity that reaches for insight and insight demands formulation. These too are natural dynamics of the child that require some form of nutrition and cultivation. What is planted is the natural desire to understand. So we might think of an analogy with the plant. The soil for a child is on 3 levels. The first is its physical well-being. Food, shelter, clothing. The second, its psyche, requires harmony, play, laughter, hope and love. The third, its mind, requires cultivation of its curiosity. Like the plant, we supply the basic needs and let the child grow. Forcing the process fragments the natural dynamics. Just as with the plant you can alternate the nutrients and water and sunlight, but the plant must do the growing on its own. So the child must do the same. The difference is that in our times we have a bit more experience and understanding of plant life and chemistry than we do of human anatomy, human psychology and the human mind. The other difference, or problem is that the child easily, too easily, absorbs our mistakes and fragmentations.⁵ A plant can become chemically agitated by toxic chemicals and apparently even by excessive vibrations in the air. These can and will inhibit its growth. It may not grow so quickly, or not in the expected manner or it may die. Its chemistry ‘fades’ due to the environment. A child’s curiosity can also fade due to the environment. Its chemistry and psyche can be suppressed and thinking loses the oneness that we spoke of earlier. The repression can inhibit growth on all levels and most of all inhibit the natural dynamic of the intellectual level, which has the greatest possibility of integrating problems on the other two levels.⁶ So breakdown can occur all along and fragmentations become a neurotic or even a psychotic phenomenon.

Perhaps you are getting some idea of the challenge of growing a child in the present culture. Children are bombarded with theories on parenting and education which are as varied as the various fragmentations of parents, researchers, and educators. We

⁵ We are of our times and stepping outside our cultural makeup is a process of self-understanding or self-transcending. See Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980, CWI 17, UOT Press, 2004, p. 11-13 on the process and possibility of self-transcendence.*

⁶ See *Insight*, ch. 15, sec. 7 on development and my “Resilience and Stress in Education” this website for discussions on integration of levels.

might think of the child as coming into our world with no self-understanding, but with dynamics that anticipate growth. For there is a dynamic anticipation, chemically, psychically and question-wise that 'expects' integration. It is not an acknowledged awareness but a natural dynamic of the child. These 'expectations' are far too often unmet and much of such anticipations become recognized as unreasonable later in life-or in therapy. The anticipations are not unreasonable in relationship to what a child is, they are unreasonable because the world has no self-understanding therefore has no idea what the child requires or why. We agree for the most a child requires food, clothing and shelter. Most would agree they need love and support and encouragement. This is, you might say, the plant level of knowledge. It is on the psyche and mind levels that we lack most of the proper growth nutrients. These nutrients come only properly from self-understanding. When we know what we are and how to grow ourself, we can become much more in tune with growing a child and have the 'patience' to do it. The word patience and its meaning are in fact products of our fragmentation. If one understands someone, patience is no longer a factor. One lives with the growing. So we know it takes 6 weeks for a certain plant to bloom and if we are not too neurotic about our plants, we enjoy their process. Likewise for a child. We know they will walk sometime around a year of age and we enjoy the process. We know they will begin to ask questions around two, so we enjoy the process towards that event, but do we? And that question brings us to the temperament of our times. We too often may feel we need to rush the child into adulthood and all that does is further fragment their natural dynamic.

So, how do we grow a child-a quest? What environment best suits that natural dynamic? Again, at what pace does your quest unfold? Do you catch on immediately? Reflect back on the puzzle offered in my first article. Did you catch on immediately or did you have to work at it for awhile? Perhaps you were completely disinterested and thought that such an activity to be irrelevant to self-understanding or to understanding a child. Perhaps you were agitated by the exercise. Or perhaps you are still working peacefully away at it. These different experiences are insightful about you and about curiosity in general. The first step is to acknowledge that we are a desire for understanding and that is manifested in our questions. A second step is to come to some

self-appreciation of our own questing and the temperaments that can contextualize our curiosity.

I hesitate to say more without providing a deeper contextualization of our questedness. For what is ‘practical’ at this time in history is self-appreciation-self-understanding. We live in a time when the interior life is hardly a topic and that reality leaves our questedness at the mercy of our present fragmentation. To continue as we are is to base practicality on mistaken theories of the interior functioning of the human subject. The context at this time is fragmentation. The push of my little articles is to recontextualize our questedness towards a deeper self-appreciation. I suspect the term fragmentation is still elusive to you, so perhaps a bit more on that. We can think of the child’s openness to experience as a possible glimpse into their less fragmented world or we might think of tribal or compact consciousness of tribal cultures. This form of consciousness held all of experience within one context, mystery interpreted as what we now call myth. All experience was held in mind within the context of mystery. They ask few questions about their experiences and ways of living remained unchanged for thousands of years.⁷ That is a quality of that type of consciousness. It is not to be degraded in any way. That form of consciousness is in touch psychologically with experience in a way that few of us today can appreciate. The child passes through this form of consciousness at an early age but fragmentation begins in the womb. The anxieties of living while pregnant can become part of the child’s nervous system’s development or the habits of an individual can be inhibitions to development. So even at this early age of compact consciousness disorientations may already be in play. Even with this experience in mind the child does pass through a period of development when their consciousness is in some way compact. So, we as parents can teach them all about Santa, the Tooth Fairy, Easter bunny (at least in western culture) and they believe us. Why, because, at this early age their consciousness is mythological in nature. They usually grow out of this around 6 to 8 years of age. So, a child can hear the stories about Santa coming down the chimney; believe them even though they do not have a fireplace.

⁷ *Insight*, ch. 17, sec. 1 “Metaphysics, Mystery, and Myth” for a discussion of the role of question in compact consciousness.

Eventually it dawns on them.⁸ This is not about being stupid. It is about a particular stage of consciousness that the child must go through before insightful connections can be made.

So children do not get jokes at this stage of consciousness even if they understand all the words used. An interesting movie on this is the late 70's film "The Gods Must be Crazy." It contrasts the consciousness of the tribal and contemporary world. Consciousness has made no significant leaps in evolution over the past few centuries let alone the past three decades. If we take such thinkers as Eric Voegelin, Philip McShane, or Karl Jaspers seriously, such changes take place only every several thousands of years. Or, we might reflect on our own life and notice on a very basic level if truly significant changes take place in our view of the world, of ourselves, of others. When a person moves through these experiences of consciousness, mythic or the world of immediacy to a world mediated by meaning, so has the history of consciousness moved from the world of immediacy to one mediated by meaning. In this manner we might think of each child as duplicating the evolution of consciousness throughout all of history. What has lasted for thousands of years in history may only last four or five years in each of us.

I have gone to great lengths above to provide the experience of difficulty in self-understanding. It might have appeared a sidetracking for you, but if the experience is bewildering, then you got the point. We are not easy to understand and we grow in understanding, real understanding that is, very slowly. What do I mean by 'real' understanding. I mean the type of experience you might be having with the puzzle. Insights just do not come sometimes. Now it can be that we are not adept at such things or have lost the desire to work it through or that puzzles may not be your 'cup of tea'. The point is insights come slowly and since insights are the core element in development and self-development, our nature is slow. Even use of the word slow becomes a relative term. If we understood ourselves, this would not appear slow, it would be the norm. If we experience our getting of insights as slow perhaps it is because we have an incarnated anxiety about life and when we enter into the dynamic of authentic development we experience a slowness, but in fact we are experiencing our nature, perhaps a bit fragmented, but our 'way'.

⁸ See my "Obedience and Self-Creation" conclusion for a brief personal story on this 'dawning'.

Growing a child is a cultivation of what they are. If we can even glimpse this as a possible ‘way’⁹ we are making some headway. Cultivation of what emerges out of our own self-understanding. In other words, until we have some self-understanding, we do not know what to cultivate and how to specifically cultivate. At this stage, working at self-understanding is the practical thing to do. As we grow in an understanding of ourselves we not only become familiar with our own inner dynamics but we also become acquainted with the ways that we caught on and as these insights become more embodied in our way of living so they become more incarnated in our manner of growing children.

I will now list the inner elements of knowing that go on within each of us. Think of your puzzling as you read this list.

1) Experience (the visual puzzle) 2) What-Question 3) Insight 4) Judgment (Formulation of your insight) 5) Is-question (Is my insight into the puzzle correct) 6) Insight 7) Formulation 8) What-to-do question 9) Insight 10) Options 11) Is-it-to-be-done question 12) Insight and 13) Decision

In summary fashion these elements go on within each of us every day. We may not be aware that these go on in any systematic manner. And we often will say things such as: ‘That’s my decision.’ or ‘I’ve got it!’ These statements refer to our inner elements but we do not necessarily mean these elements when we say these things or we do not at least advert to the actual element. We refer to the content of these elements. So if we decide to go to MacDonald’s for lunch and someone questions us, we may say ‘That’s my decision.’ But we are referring to the decision of going to MacDonalds, the content of the decision and not directly to the element of decision. We cannot have the experience of an element without content. The point is that if we draw a distinction between the element and the content of an element we are beginning to become more aware of ourself, our consciousness. It is a heightening of awareness. This of course is on the level of experience. To understand one element is to relate it functionally to the other elements. But at least by noticing that you do this, a significant beginning is made in a culture that unintentionally neglects our inner world. To work out the functional relations between the elements is a much more difficult task.

⁹ Philip McShane, *Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders*, unpub. Written at Oxford 1989. See ch. 1 and beyond for a discussion of the challenge of our “Way”.

By cultivation I mean the ‘growing’ of the structure of these elements and self-awareness without distorting their functioning.¹⁰ So to grow a child’s quest is to allow them to search out their own questions, to follow their curiosity. It is interesting to think of someone following his or her curiosity. Notice how the term ‘follow’ first signifies an outer move of direction and yet our curiosity is not ‘out there’ so to speak. So, how do we ‘follow’ our curiosity? Who is doing or what is doing the following? Is it you that follows and what do you mean by ‘you’? These are deeper questions that may open up to you as you become more familiar with your inner life.

The child follows or is driven by their curiosity to get some understanding, some insight that will resolve their question just as you have been doing with the puzzle. Do you want the question to ‘go away’? I would hope you answered ‘Yes’. But do you want it to fall away to insignificance or do you want to resolve it through insight? This brings us back to interest and temperament. Either way, I suspect you want the question to resolve itself. This ‘wanting’ is a dynamic of the question. It is quite often difficult to just put it ‘away’.

Let us recall our puzzle and go through these elements in an effort to highlight their performance in you. I provided the experience-the puzzle as merely a seen image, letters and a line. I arranged them in a specific pattern. Intelligence notes a pattern, but just what is the pattern? The question has emerged. What are you seeking, an insight? How do you know that an insight will first dissolve the question and secondly provide you with the solution? Notice how we do this quite spontaneously and yet have not been taught that an insight is what is required. Once you get the insight you formulate it- a judgment is made. This is the pattern..... etc and you complete the alphabet. In completing the alphabet you are checking out your insight. You are verifying its correctness. The second level of questioning-Is it so? And then you formulate that insight with a Yes or No judgment. Where the insights formulated to What questions are explanatory in nature, the insights formulated in judgment by Is questions are properly responded to by a Yes or No in terms of the correctness of the original explanatory insight. At this stage we may go on to ask What will I do with this puzzle, a third level of

¹⁰ This is impossible in our times even if one has been quite successful at self-understanding. See McShane, *Searching for Cultural Foundations*, Preface page v on the disruption of compact consciousness and the resulting fragmentation. The disruption has been massive and quite stable in its survival.

questioning. And follow through with insights concerning options and finally an insight to decision: I will share this puzzle with my friends or my students.

In following through these steps you have gone through all 13 elements that constitute knowing. Whether one is teaching geometry, physics, chemistry the arts, economics, these elements are functioning. Even though we go through these spontaneously, the fact that they are unknown or unacknowledged leaves us adrift in an unsystematic manner in learning. It does the same for a teacher in that this structure of knowing provides the basis for planning a lesson or lecture. The absence of this self-knowledge puts emphasis on content to the neglect of the cultivation of the child. It also creates a haphazard environment of learning. Sometimes you may hit it off and follow the structure fairly closely and on other occasions you may not. Once the structure is known, is appropriated as you dynamically knowing, you will gradually and more spontaneously begin to follow the structure¹¹ and not only does the child learn content but learns it in the manner in which their mind functions. So cultivation of the child and the content occur at one and the same time without any distortion of the child's knowing structure. Are you getting some glimpse of what I mean by cultivation? It is a process of nurturing what is naturally dynamic in the child and in you and I. Enough perhaps has been said to engage you hopefully in some self-appreciation. In the next article: "Teaching Children Children: A lesson in Geometry"¹²

¹¹ I am speaking from my own experience here in that this is a long-term project and reaching some authenticity in living is extremely difficult as the bones that have been grown are molecularly quite set. So we might imagine slightly less 'set' bones as generations and ages unfold so that at least we are in a direction towards authenticity and that might be all we can achieve, an authenticity of direction. That in itself would be progress. See *Insight* Ch. 7, sec. 8.5 on Culture and Reversal.

¹² I borrow this title and idea from discussions with Philip McShane. The duplication of wording will hopefully reveal itself in this next article.