

In the early 1960s, an interviewer was trying to get Ernest Hemingway to identify the characteristics required for a person to be a “great writer.” As the interviewer offered a list of various possibilities, Hemingway disparaged each in sequence. Finally, frustrated, the interviewer asked, “Isn’t there any one essential ingredient that you can identify?” Hemingway replied, “Yes, there is. In order to be a great writer a person must have a built-in, shockproof crap detector.”

from *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*
by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, 1969

A culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it—by persons who have cut holes in the confining stockade of verbalized symbols and so are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves, in a new and relatively unprejudiced way. Such persons are not merely born; they must also be made. But how?

In the field of formal education, what the would-be hole cutter needs is knowledge; knowledge of the past and present history of cultures in all their fantastic variety, and knowledge about the nature and limitations, the uses and abuses, of language. A man who knows that there have been many cultures, and that each culture claims to be the best and truest of all, will find it hard to take too seriously the boastings and dogmatizings of his own tradition. Similarly, a man who knows how symbols are related to experience, and who practices the kind of linguistic self-control taught by the exponents of General Semantics, is unlikely to take too seriously the absurd or dangerous nonsense that, within every culture, passes for philosophy, practical wisdom and political argument. As a preparation for hole cutting, this kind of intellectual education is certainly valuable, but no less certainly insufficient. Training on the verbal level needs to be supplemented by training in wordless experiencing. We must learn how to be mentally silent, we must cultivate the art of pure receptivity.

from “Culture and the Individual” by Aldous Huxley, 1963

If the world has nearly destroyed itself, it is not from lack of knowledge in the sense that we lack the knowledge to cure cancer or release atomic energy, but is due to the fact that the mass of men [and women] have not applied to public policy knowledge which they already possess, which is indeed of almost universal possession, deducible from the facts of everyday life.

If this is true - and it seems inescapable - then no education which consists mainly in the dissemination of "knowledge" can save us. If men [and women] can disregard in their policies the facts they already know, they can just as easily disregard new facts which they do not at present know. What is needed is the development in men [and women] of that particular type of skill which will enable them to make social use of knowledge already in their possession; enable them to apply simple, sometimes self-evident, truths to the guidance of their common life.

- Sir Norman Angell, 1942