Herbert Read on Education

MICHAEL J. PARSONS

What does Herbert Read say about theory of education, and what are we to think of what he says? He has been influential in education in a number of ways. He has, for instance, been partly responsible for our interest in the aesthetic value of children's paintings and for our increased reluctance to force adult or realistic styles of art on children. To this, and to many other points, he has lent his prestige as a critic and a historian of art and, what is more interesting from the point of view of this analysis, he has also claimed to support them with a theory. It is this theory that I shall be concerned with here.

The exposition and defense of the theory comprise the major parts of his books on education. Though he offers many kinds of empirical evidence on its behalf (for example, evidence from psychology, psychoanalysis, the history of art, anthropology), it is apparent that it is centrally a theory in philosophical aesthetics. Aesthetics, it may be said, is always the starting point of any serious discussion, whether of society, psychology, politics, or education; and the heart of aesthetics, in his view, is the attempt to discover the "nature" of art. To understand his views on education, therefore, one has to understand what he thinks art is.

This is not the place, however, for a detailed discussion or exposition of Read's aesthetics as such. My intention is rather to discuss the educational relevance of his theory of the "nature" of art, and to confine exposition of that theory to what is required for this purpose. Similarly,

MICHAEL J. PARSONS *did his undergraduate work at Oxford University, England. He completed his Ph.D. in the philosophy of education at the University of Illinois where his dissertation topic was Herbert Read's educational philosophy. He contributed to the research study* Philosophy of Education: An Organization of Topics and Selected Sources *and currently teaches courses in the foundations of education at the University of Utah.*

what comment or criticism is offered will be concerned with its adequacy as an educational theory and not as an aesthetic one. This undertaking seems worthwhile because Read himself eschews system and is not always clear on the relationship of his theory to particular recommendations. I doubt whether anyone has read *Education Through Art* for the first time without being confused by its suggestive diversity and lack of obvious structure. It is important, then, to try to estimate wherein its chief contribution to education as theory lies.

Fortunately, it is the general structure and not the detail of Read's aesthetics that is important as theory for education. Moreover, the broad outline of his theory of art is not original (as he would be the first to acknowledge), but is a part of the major modern tradition in aesthetics. To say this is not to deny Read originality or distinctiveness at many points; it is only to say that the central idea in his aesthetics — what art "is" — is similiar to that of well-known figures in modern aesthetics, figures that Read constantly invokes. This tradition is indicated well enough for my purpose by Susanne Langer, who describes her own work as a part of

> a philosophy of art on which many aestheticians have already labored, the theory of expressive form. Despite all blind leads, shortcomings, or mistakes that they may see in each other's doctrines, I believe that Bell, Fry, Bergson, Baensch, Collingwood, Cassirer, and I (not to forget such literary critics as Barfield and Day Lewis, and others too whom I have not named and perhaps not even read) have been and are, really, engaged on one philosophical project.[1]

The close comparison of Read with different writers in this list would undoubtedly show some differences of emphasis and detail; so would the comparison of different statements of Read himself. My point is, however, that these differences are not of great importance for answering the question with which I start. The interest and originality of Read for the theory of education lies in the fact that, having these views of the nature of art, he is convinced of their significance for the conduct of education generally and has, one might say, famously written to persuade us also. The unoriginality of his aesthetics in its general aspects is in a sense a preliminary point in favor of his educational writings, since it means that they rest on views which, though not universally accepted, are at least not idiosyncratic.

II

I shall begin by trying to say what I think the educational significance

[1] *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 410.

of Read's aesthetics is not. What I say may challenge a few conceptions in the field, though I shall say here no more than Read has said himself.

First, there are no curricular "implications" to it. That is to say, Read's general ideas are not such that one can easily derive from them specific recommendations for the curriculum of the schools. Rather his ideas are more properly regarded as ruling out, or devaluing, certain kinds of study. This point is discussed below.

It might be objected that surely one of the things he advocates is more emphasis in the schools on the visual arts. Now it is true that he does advocate this at times; but my point is that his advocacy is not connected logically with the argument that rests on his aesthetic theory, an argument that may be summarized by the slogan "education through art."[2] This is an important distinction to make, partly because Read himself does not always clearly observe it. He does, however, often say that in talking about the visual arts in education he intends the generalization to be made to the other arts. For example:

> In all our discussions of the place of art in education, there is admittedly a tendency to confine our observations to pictorial art. . . . Let me therefore make it perfectly clear to you that anything I have to say about the art of children, and its importance in education, applies to all the arts.[3]

Moreover, this assertion, that what he has to say applies "to all the arts," leaves open what is to count as one of the arts. One might think, as *Edu-*

[2] For instance, Read discusses the role of visual imagery in thinking and in the development of thinking in connection with his discussion of the eidetic image in *Education Through Art.* (Chap. 3, see especially pp. 49-60.) This is a topic on which much empirical research has been done, and what he wishes to say is not, in itself, very controversial. He wishes to say that the visual imagination is not only an ornament of thought but in some situations may be an autonomous mode of thought with its own advantages and disadvantages. In particular, it has advantages where the situation calls for a high degree of originality or inventiveness. This is a message not unfamiliar to art educators today. It is found, for instance, in Rudolf Arnheim, "Visual Thinking," in Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), *The Education of Vision* (New York: Braziller, 1965); and in V. Lowenfeld and W. L. Brittain, *Creative and Mental Growth,* 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1964), chap. 1. Evidently it is of considerable importance to inquire into the relative value of the various media for the conduct of kinds of thought in different kinds of situation. But it is confusing not to emphasize that the distinction between visual and other imagery is quite different from the distinction between reflective and intuitive modes of thought. It is the latter which is important to Read's conception of the nature of art. Another argument for a greater stress on the visual arts in our schools today, which is often associated with the above argument, is based on the claim that the visual image plays a larger part in social communication than it did formerly, through the spread of photography, film, television, and magazines. This forms a minor theme in Read's writing — see e.g., *The Grass Roots of Art* (New York: Meridian Books, 1964), p. 109 — but has been elaborated by others, e.g., Gyorgy Kepes, in the introduction to the volume cited above.

[3] *The Grass Roots of Art* (New York: Meridian Books, 1964), p. 109.

cation Through Art[4] leads one to believe, that he intends to include all the traditional arts, widely construed, under this head, and consequently to suggest that work in the traditional media should be emphasized at the expense of other kinds of work usually found in the school curriculum. Elsewhere he states what I think is his more permanent and consistent opinion:

> Our aim is not two or more extra periods. We demand nothing less than the whole 35 into which the child's week is now arbitrarily divided. We demand, that is to say, a method of education that is formally and fundamentally aesthetic, and in which knowledge and manual ability, discipline and reverence, are but so many easy and inevitable by-products of a natural childish industry. . . .
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> . . . the integral education which I conceive is relatively indifferent to the fate of individual subjects, since its underlying assumption is that the purpose of education is to develop generic qualities of insight and sensibility, which qualities are fundamental even in mathematics and geography.[5]

From this it appears that art is not one or some of the "subjects" in the common curriculum, but is something more like a method whereby any "subject" may be taught. No change in curriculum structure itself is required therefore; mathematics and geography may be retained, but should be taught through a method that is "formally and fundamentally aesthetic." Consequently Read's message is of interest to all educators, and not only to the teachers of the visual arts.

The reason for thinking this is Read's more permanent opinion is that "art," when he is using it most carefully, does not have reference to any particular media. It refers not to particular works but to the activity of mind that produced them; and this activity is distinguished, not by the medium or media with which it works, but by its place in the total economy of mind.

The most general account of this activity is that it is the discrimination of form in things: what Croce called "intuition." To discriminate form in things is to become aware of what they are for the first time; it is to notice what qualities they have. In a strict sense, it is to see (or hear) properly.[6] Perception itself is therefore a basic form of the activity of art, an idea that pervades Read's writings. For example:

> The most neglected factor in education is the autonomous mental activity

[4] Third ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1958). Hereinafter referred to as ETA.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.
[6] *Icon and Idea* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 17-18.

that is constantly at work transforming the multiplicity of visual impressions into apprehensible unities, forms that intuitively reflect our feelings. Every such act of visual cognition is itself an elementary artistic form. . . .[7]

This activity of apprehending forms is evidently an intellectual affair, in a broad sense, though it is not reflective or self-conscious. That is to say, it cannot be produced at will by deliberation, nor can it proceed according to previously formulated rules; yet it has to do with cognition. Most of what we think of as perception is in fact only recognition; we do not apprehend the form afresh but are reminded of a form that we previously apprehended. Instead of investigating the object before us and responding in terms of its actual qualities, we impose upon it the form it reminds us of and respond in those terms. It may be that verbal formulations are the most common forms that are imposed in this way on reality; in principle, however, any kind of form will suffice. But the cognition, as opposed to the recognition, of qualities, which is the basic form of art, is an achievement that is not to be taken for granted. It requires effort, and the most fundamental form of that effort is attention.

What in this is most immediately relevant is the implication that the activity of art is not limited to any particular medium. Nevertheless, it is clear that it requires a medium of some kind. It must deal with forms that can be apprehended in terms of the senses; one cannot discriminate qualities that are not the qualities of a medium.[8] But the notion of a medium is wide enough to include as possible candidates for art reports of scientific research, batting strokes at cricket, the gestures of peasants, and algebraic symbols. Moreover, it does not necessarily refer to physical reality. An object imagined in the mind is as much dependent on a medium as is an object actually seen or created in a physical sense; it is an affair of colors and lines, or of words, or of tones and rhythms, and so on, as is the perception of "real" objects. It follows that an imagined object may be as much a case of art as one that has been "externalized." Read is not consistent on this latter point,[9] but it is clear that he wants to count the observation of one's own daydreams and spontaneous fantasies as art and as a paradigm of the best "method of education."[10]

I conclude, therefore, that Read does not mean to be recommending curricular changes when he advocates "education through art." He does not always make this perfectly clear himself because he uses the

[7] *The Redemption of the Robot* (New York: Trident Press, 1966), p. 170.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.
[9] *Art and Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), p. 112.
[10] *Education Through Art*, pp. 191-92.

word "art" somewhat ambiguously, with the sense, in addition to that just outlined, both of the "pictorial arts" and of "all the arts" as traditionally conceived. He moves uneasily between these three senses of the word, as, for example, in the transition from the end of the sixth chapter of ETA, where "art" (evidently in the widest sense) is the answer to the "mass psychosis" represented by twentieth century society, to the beginning of the seventh chapter, where he discusses some problems in the teaching of the pictorial arts. Nevertheless, my conclusion is supported by various explicit assertions in Read's writings; for example, the following passage directly asserts the connection between the aesthetic theory and the attitude to the curriculum already illustrated.

> . . . those activities which we denote by such words as "imaginative," "creative," "originating," "aesthetic," do not represent a subject with definite limits which can be treated like any other subject and allotted its two or five or seven periods in a competitive time-table, but are rather an aspect of mental development which is all-embracing — which is, indeed, no aspect but a *mode* of mental development. The imaginative does not stand over against the logical, the originating against the didactic, the artistic against the utilitarian, as a claimant to which a concession must be more or less unwillingly made; the two processes are in absolute opposition, and though the end we desire may be called a synthesis, our contention is that the basis of all intellectual and moral strength lies in the adequate integration of the perceptive senses and the external world, of the personal and the organic. . . .
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> It follows that from our point of view the wrangle over the time-table is as unnecessary as it is unseemly.[11]

Read refers here to the "absolute opposition" of the discursive and nondiscursive. I do not think this is meant to deny the corollary of what has been said, that the reflective activities of the mind depend (in some sense) on the nonreflective activity of art; this is indeed one of Read's more frequent assertions. It refers rather to the autonomy of the nonreflective, and to the danger that forms already articulated may interfere with the apprehension of new forms. Recognition prejudices perception, and it is the insistence on the school's failure to allow for this that is Read's most characteristic note.

There is one possible and general kind of exception to this conclusion, which Read himself does not explicitly discuss. It derives from the fact that, in Read's view, to discriminate form is also to express emotion, where "expressing an emotion" is virtually equivalent to becoming aware of the character of an emotion. For to discriminate the form of something is to discover what significance it has for one, and that is to discover

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 220. Read's italics.

the character of the emotion, or "feeling" it gives rise to. The first way of talking about it is to talk about the "objective aspect" of art, the latter, about the "subjective aspect."[12] The general reason why the activity of art has this dual aspect is that an emotion is necessarily something that is directed towards an object, and in normal circumstances varies with the object. Thus, in a passage already quoted, Read mentions "forms that intuitively reflect our feelings." This notion of art as "expressing emotions" is common to the aesthetic tradition to which Read belongs, and is so pervasive in his work that its presence may perhaps be excused further substantiation here.

The point of Read's expression theory of art is that it leads directly to the notion of art as a means for exploring the self,[13] and to the consequent claim that one of the purposes of education is to assist the child in clarifying his emotions and discovering his self. In Read's work this is associated with psychoanalytic interpretations of art, though this does not seem to be necessary. In either case it seems to me that if we take this seriously, then we may find that some media, notably the "traditional" media, are better than others for this purpose. Some, it may be found, are not well suited in this respect. Read urges us to treat mathematics as art in school; but mathematics, conceived as a medium for the exploration of emotion, may have a very restricted range. It seems at first sight to be limited to the expression of those emotions attendant upon the discovery and use of mathematical relationships. No doubt those emotions are important and in some people may be very strong, but it seems hard to deny that they play a small part in the emotional range of most people. The consequence seems to be that mathematics as an art medium should not play a large part in the curriculum. This, however, is a speculative inference, since Read himself does not discuss it.

I have said that to advocate "education through art" in Read's sense is not to recommend specific changes in the school curriculum. Is it then to recommend a way, or a method, of teaching or, more generally, to talk about the "manner" rather than the "content" of education?

If we mean anything specific by "method," then I think the answer is once again no. We will not find in Read's theory any grounds for preferring one particular procedure in teaching, nor any suggestion that there are certain steps or stages necessary for good method. He explicitly disclaims knowing which methods are most effective in any kind of

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[13] *Icon and Idea*, chap. 5.

teaching.[14] This is partly the modesty of the nonprofessional;[15] but he also believes that in principle good teaching methods cannot be prescribed in advance:

> It is easier to describe the methods which have bad results than those which have good results, for the former are definite and decisive, the latter infinitely subtle and uncertain. The bad results are always produced by a method which is too conscious and deliberate, by a discipline which is imposed from without, which is the command of a drill-sergeant. The good results are produced apparently by no method at all, or by a system of hints and suggestions. . . .[16]

It need hardly be said that it would be a mistake to conclude that because there are many times when the teacher is required to do nothing overt or obvious he is unnecessary; it is simply that the particular ways in which, or the points at which, the teacher is useful cannot be determined in advance.

Read believes that definiteness in teaching method is unattainable because method in that sense is possible only when the outcome can be foreseen. Means can be calculated where the end is known; and the greater the detail in which the end is known, the more specific one can be in fashioning the means. But the end of teaching is the stimulation of art and the particular form that it will take is unknown. This is necessarily so for, according to Read, art is unreflective or "spontaneous." It is not the product of calculation or reflection. The attempt to calculate or predict the end interferes with the activity in question, since that activity consists in giving shape to what is yet unknown. That is to say, reflection must work with forms that have already been articulated, with words, for example, whose meanings are very largely determined in advance of their use; but art does not. To employ a discursive language in this way is to impose shapes on what one is dealing with, with the assumption that one already knows its character. In different terms, reflection is the product of consciousness, which is why it can be produced at will. But consciousness is the product of art, for until some of the features of things have been discriminated one cannot be conscious of them. And consciousness is always consciousness of something. What one is not conscious of one cannot reflect upon. This is why the discursive use of symbols — reflective thinking — is said to be dependent on art; it is also said to be in "opposition" to art because the reflective mind can interfere at will with the spontaneous activity by directing

[14] This is not to say that Read does not do this on other grounds; see J. S. Keel, "Sir Herbert Read on the Teaching of Art," *School Arts*, Vol. 63 (December 1963), 19-21.

[15] *Education Through Art*, p. 13.

[16] *Grass Roots of Art*, pp. 107-8.

attention in predetermined directions. Habitually done, this is the death of art. It is also detrimental to the mind as a whole because it cuts off the supply of images relevant to reality for the reflective intellect to work with. And this is what the teacher does to the child when she starts out with a formulation of what is to be learned and insists on the child making a similar formulation. The discipline which is required to keep the classroom experience from being chaotic, and which is supplied "from without" the child's experience by the teacher with such a method, should arise from the activity itself; that is, from being attentive to the qualities of the materials being used.

What Read has to say about method is therefore largely negative. The teacher must avoid being too rigid or domineering. She must not change what the child is doing so much as discover what he is trying to do and then offer to help to improve it. In any case, she should avoid the traditional emphasis on rote learning and formal definitions. "Education through art," then, is not unlike some current slogans about "learning through discovery." "Discovery" is no less slippery a concept than "art"; and it is clear that such slogans can have little to say about teaching method, except negatively. For neither discovery nor art is a method or a way of teaching or learning; rather they are achievements. One may discover something in any one of a number of ways, or merely by luck. To insist on "learning through discovery," therefore, is only to protest against some ways of teaching which are not likely to produce discovery. The same is true of "education through art," and what is most likely to prejudice the achievement of art in school is the teacher's assurance that the proper outcome of the lesson has already been decided.

"Education through art" is similar to "learning through discovery," too, in that it protests the same kind of teaching method. This is evidently because "art" in Read's sense means something not unlike "discovery," though it is a much more inclusive term. They both refer to the achievement of insight, though "art" refers to more than is usually meant by this. This confirms the suggestion that it would be a mistake to look for a method of art in any way parallel to the "method of science" that Dewey proposed as a model for educational method.[17] The method of science is concerned with the verification of insight and not with its initial achievement. It is the business of the reflective intellect and is therefore susceptible to system and method. But it depends upon insight for the supply of hypotheses that it tests; it cannot itself supply

[17] As has been done, for instance, by David Ecker in "The Artistic Process as Qualitative Problem Solving," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 21, No. 40 (Spring 1963), 283-90.

them. And the creative processes of scientists are similar to those of painters and of children — for they are all a part of "art." This is especially true of the more original and important scientists.[18]

III

So far, I have argued against looking to Read's theory of art for specific recommendations regarding the practice of education. This is far from arguing that his work has no value; it is only to begin to say what that value is.

The value of Read's theoretical work, in general terms, may be said to be largely the value of continuing protest. His whole career may be seen as a protest against certain powerful tendencies in modern society and education, tendencies that stifle spontaneity, freedom, and art. What he sees himself protesting against varies not in character but in extent. At its most expansive, it is very broad; he has never lost the revolutionary sense that characterized his generation:

> . . . the secret of our collective ills is to be traced to the suppression of spontaneous creative ability in the individual. The lack of spontaneity, in education and in social organization, is due to that disintegration of the personality which has been the fatal result of economic, industrial, and cultural developments since the Renaissance.[19]

Against these developments, he urges three main points. The first and most important is that art is a proper object of the school's concern in its own right. The second and third are that it is also instrumental not only in the achievement of the discursive forms of knowledge but also in the achievement of true morality. I shall consider these claims briefly in turn.

The claim that art is intrinsically valuable and that therefore the school should foster it has often been made, though less often acted on. His theory of art, as I have interpreted it, puts this plea in a slightly different light. For the argument is not that the school should attempt to educate the emotions as well as the intellect, or that the practice of art has a role in the maintenance of mental health, or that, in general, there is something of value in addition to the intellectual with which the school should be concerned. It is rather that art is valuable because intellectual activity is valuable; that because the school has to do with the latter, it should have to do with the former. It is an extension of the scope of the notion of the "intellectual," which is achieved by the

[18] *Education Through Art,* p. 53.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 201.

definition of art as the discovery of form. For Read this is doubtless the most important reason why the school should be concerned with art, though it may not be the most politic on which to dwell.

To emphasize that the activity of art is a condition of acquiring an understanding of discursively formulated knowledge, such as the schools have always concentrated on, is to emphasize that in many cases it is equivalent to what we would normally call "insight." For to acquire a new concept involves two logically different steps: learning the word for the new concept and discriminating the kinds of things which are to be counted as cases of the concept. The more important and difficult of these is clearly the latter step of deciding what is to count as a case covered by the concept. This requires the activity which Read calls "art." For example, imagine drawing a triangle on a board and saying to a child: "This is a triangle." (I choose an example from geometry partly to emphasize an earlier point: that "art" is not restricted to the visual arts or to the traditional media.) To understand the word "triangle" the child must discriminate the drawing from whatever other marks and scratches may be on the board; and, contemplating the drawing, he must discriminate its triangularity from its color, its size, and so on. Such a discrimination is done visually, not verbally, that is, using line as the medium, not words. If the discrimination is not made, then learning the word "triangle," Read would say, is useless, and perhaps worse than useless. It is at best an exercise of memory, an external handling of symbols. This is what Read thinks the schools have typically encouraged; they have attempted to hand over the discursive forms of knowledge without the necessary prior engagement in the activity of art. This is done by the method of being told something and then trying to remember it.[20]

It might be objected that the case of discriminating a triangle, while it might fit the definition of art as "intuition," does not apparently fit that of art as "the expression of emotion." Such an objection would neglect the fact that the two definitions are alternative descriptions of the same activity. In this case the form discriminated for the first time by the child expresses for him his feeling for triangularity, where "feeling" is the emotion directed toward the triangle. Such an emotion is ineffable in other terms; it may perhaps be said to be an anticipation of the meaning that is yet to be developed into conceptual knowledge, and is perhaps felt simply as a sense that the form discriminated is im-

[20] For a well known paper that asserts the same point of view in relation to the teaching of mathematics, see Gertrude Hendrix, "Learning by Discovery," *The Mathematics Teacher,* Vol. 54, No. 5 (May 1961), 290-99.

portant. We may doubt that in this case there is an emotion to be "expressed" only because the form "triangle" has for most of us long been formulated and articulated in discursive terms. Our perception of it is therefore always a case of recognition and not art. But in the case of a scientist or mathematician working on the frontiers of his subject, the aspect of expression as opposed to that of intuition becomes more noticeable; there is a more obvious dependence on felt significance, less on the guidance of knowledge already formulated by someone else. These are the cases where the activity of art is most obvious, and which, in Read's judgment, are most analogous to the situation of the child.

Of course, this is a very general interpretation of what Read is saying, and it is not at all clear how it is to be interpreted in practice. One way of putting the difference is to say that we have been discussing the logical, or perhaps the epistemological, priority of art to the higher cognitive functions; but the practical question is whether or not art must also be temporally prior. It is clear that logical priority does not necessarily imply temporal priority. It may well be that one learns discursively about the triangle before one has really understood what a triangle is and that the discursive knowledge about it is valueless until one understands what a triangle is. But it may also be that knowing about triangles promotes the understanding of what a triangle is, that the use of the word prompts attention to the form. It may also be that the two occur simultaneously: that as soon as something is pointed out to one, one understands the distinction being made, though one may not have been able to make the distinction without having it verbalized by another. Indeed, one might be tempted to say that this is just what we mean by "instruction": the attempt to bring about the discriminative activity of the learner by passing on the discursive forms of knowledge. And it might be held that it is a good thing for the instructor to speak at times a little beyond the immediate grasp of his students, to leave them puzzling with articulated symbols they do not fully understand; that is, deliberately to put the discursive stage temporally before the nondiscursive on which it logically depends. Read does not discuss this question directly, nor does he distinguish the two orders of priority, with the result that one cannot be certain how he intends to be interpreted in practice on the matter of instruction. But his discussions of the role of the teacher do seem to preclude any systematic instruction in this sense. The passage already quoted points in this direction; and the familiar roles in which the teacher is cast, of midwife, friend, and fellow-artist,[21] concur. The reasonable conclusion is that in Read's

[21] *Education Through Art,* chaps. 8 and 9.

opinion any attempt to pass on the discursive forms of knowledge which does not provoke an immediate response in the child is to be deplored. Unless the child can understand at once, through the activity of art, the meaning of the symbol used, to insist that he remember or try to understand it is useless. Perhaps it is also harmful because it may prejudice the child's present opportunities of meaningful discrimination.

Read's point in connection with morality is similar and can be stated very briefly. Just as knowledge does not lie in the mere possession of discursive symbols, but in their understanding, so morality does not lie in the mere performance of certain acts. These are the outward forms, and morality requires an understanding of their character as moral acts. Such an understanding is both an awareness of the characteristics that make the act moral and the feeling that accompanies such an awareness. If one is to understand that an act one is doing is morally good, then one must *feel* that it is morally good; else it is all mere obedience or hypocrisy:

> The sense of right and wrong is a subjective sense; if I do not *feel* what is right and what is wrong, I cannot act rightly and wrongly, except under compulsion. To *know* a code of right and wrong is to know someone else's conception of right and wrong.[22]

It follows in just the same way that requiring the remembering of a set of rules and exacting obedience to them has little to do with moral education. Preaching would be the activity that is parallel with instruction in the previous discussion; and it seems to Read to be our typical method:

> The only method of moral education developed in the modern world is education by precept. These are the laws, these are the commandments, this is done and that is not done by the best people: obey, conform, go and do likewise.[23]

It may well be said that, if this interpretation of Read's general point is right, his protest goes too far in the opposite direction. To make the point about the necessity of the activity of art in school, it does not seem necessary to preclude all instruction (in the sense of "instruction" just indicated). And to insist on the image of the child as an artist or a creative scientist is not sufficient, though it may be salutary.

The point might be made by pointing to the common sense distinction between the answer to a problem in mathematics which satisfies the child's sense of fittingness, and the one which is right. Granted that before any solution can be understood by the child he must discriminate

[22] *Anarchy and Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 123.
[23] *The Grass Roots of Art*, p. 114.

and pay attention to the logical character of certain relationships dictated by the problem. Such an intuition necessarily sees itself as plausible; or more accurately, the intuition arises at a level which excludes consideration of validity and invalidity.[24] The intuition must be had before the question of correctness can arise. This is a necessary condition of doing any mathematics at all. But what Read apparently fails to take into account is the fact that certain relations may appear logical to the child, and therefore certain arguments valid, which do not guarantee that validity. To leave the matter there is to assume that whatever is plausible is right. We know very well that apparent validity is quite compatible with actual invalidity, where that actuality is determined by the discipline of mathematics. Indeed, a large part of the history of mathematics consists in the progressive demonstration of uncertainty on points previously considered certain. The generalizations and rules currently accepted as the structure of mathematics by mathematicians represent a public accumulation of the results of the intuitions of centuries. It is well to take the child's intuitions seriously, but one doesn't have to believe that certain answers or generalizations are right in any absolute sense to agree that they may be better (in a mathematical sense) than others the child devises. It is not a matter of indifference whether the child comes to understand and share what is held by mathematicians to be good math, for it is the best so far devised. If the child could construct for himself alternative systems of equal validity, then perhaps it would not matter; but he cannot.

There is, therefore, for practical purposes, a right answer or answers to the kind of questions with which the school must deal, as well as a number of wrong answers. When a child finds a wrong answer satisfactory, it is because in the formulation of the problem he has made inappropriate distinctions or irrelevant connections, demonstrated ultimately by the kinds of tests used in the appropriate discipline. It is the teacher's function to bring the child to see this inappropriateness or irrelevance wherever possible. But this is often possible only through deliberate instruction, and may require periods during which the child relies on the teacher's authority and not on his aesthetic sense of what is fitting. For it is important that the child learn to check his insight against the rules, and to understand the difference between an answer that pleases him and a correct one. He must be prepared at times to have faith in the rules when his own insight will not support them, and

[24] Cf. B. Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), pp. 3-4.

to acknowledge that his own sense of fittingness does not guarantee truth. Otherwise he will become intolerantly dogmatic. So there may even be cases where instruction must begin by disrupting the learner's present sense of fittingness in order to build a more complex harmony. Many a child, for instance, begins by finding it obvious that deficit financing at the government level is wrong, or that certain social rights and privileges belong to members of one race but not of another. It may require the intervention of a considerable body of theory to bring him to see otherwise. Even where such intervention is unsuccessful, it is desirable that he understand the kinds of tests and forms of argument that are considered relevant by others.

It is true that, in the case of the mathematician or scientist working on the frontier of his subject, personal insight must be relied on beyond, and sometimes even in spite of, the rules. This is, after all, the origin of the rules. But the question is whether the identification of the learner with the research scientist (or the artist) is appropriate in this respect. For the judgment of the mathematician or scientist is one which has learned to be tentative and self-searching. It is, moreover, as scientific judgment, subject to the judgment of all other qualified scientists and relevant procedures of verification. This is not necessarily a good model for the child in school who has not absorbed the tradition of the subject. To use it is to underestimate the difficulty of absorbing that tradition and of achieving the disciplined judgment in question. Such a model presupposes the possession and use of systematic knowledge which a child cannot be expected to have and the acquisition of which is unlikely without deliberate instruction.

The same point could be made in connection with Read's conception of morality. What he stresses is the fact — for I take it to be a fact — that no action is morally good unless the actor performs it because he has intuited its fittingness in the circumstances. What he fails to allow for is the possibility that the child's intuition may omit some elements of the situation which are morally relevant or include some which are morally irrelevant. It is true that we do not agree in matters of morality as much as we do in those of science, but Read would not want to claim that morality is only a matter of opinion, any more than he would claim that what is logically valid is only a matter of opinion. When objective facts have moral relevance, that relevance is the same for everyone. Our very concept of morality implies that moral rules are both prescriptive and universal. For the child to be moral, therefore, he must bring his own actions under a rule which he recognizes as applying equally to

all.[25] Without this the child is not a moral agent, and his intuitions of fittingness are not sufficient to make him so. It follows that he must come to see his own intuitions as fallible and capable of correction. A part of the teacher's task is to make this correction possible.

To generalize this objection, it may be said that Read neglects and perhaps depreciates the public character of knowledge and morality and the importance of methods of verification and rules in its achievement. One might offer at least three reasons for this, two of which have already been mentioned. The first is that, when he is talking theoretically, he is concerned with essences, or definitions. He is concerned to say what education is, or, as it is more usually put, what the "aim" of education is, exactly as he wants to say what art is. His answer is therefore a statement of ultimate unities and not of proximate differences. It is not a practical answer, not likely to be of much use in answering the questions of practice that teachers may want to ask.

The second reason is that he writes in reaction to a situation in which, as he saw it, education was construed as not much more than bringing children to obey rules, just as art was conceived as wholly a reflective enterprise. The heat of his reaction may have led him to overemphasize his point: the importance of the missing element of insight and creativity.

A third factor is what seems an excessive optimism in the sufficiency of the uninstructed individual. In school we are to do away with, not guidance, but systematic instruction in the elaborate, verbalized structures of the various arts and sciences and of morality. But these cannot be produced anew by any child; they are interpersonal achievements which have been built over centuries; they constitute the fabric of our civilization, and no individual can assimilate more than portions or add more than fragments. Though they must be embodied in individuals, they are neither innate nor created by any one person. The tentative and inquiring spirit of both science and morality, for instance, is not native to the human mind; it is a product of institutions and dependent on education. There was a time, perhaps, in favored spots on the earth, when that spirit could be taken for granted in most people because it was assimilated unconsciously in the process of living in society. But, if so, that time has passed. The institutional character of civilization has become more apparent now than ever before. There is ever more and more to be learned deliberately, and we are more aware of the cases where the processes of unplanned assimilation have not been successful.

[25] See R. M. Hare, "Adolescents into Adults," in T. H. Hollins (ed.), *Aims in Education* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), pp. 47-70.

It may be that Read's optimism is due to the carrying over of this assumption from an earlier time to one where it is no longer appropriate. He overestimates, it seems, the level which the uninstructed can reach through informal interaction with nature and society and the ease and inevitability with which this learning may be achieved.

To illustrate the consequences of this optimism, I point to the passage in ETA where he claims to be summarizing Plato on education and quotes the passage from the *Republic*:

> Our young men, dwelling, as it were, in a healthful region, may drink in good from every quarter, whence any emanations from noble works strike upon their eye or ear, like a gale wafting health from salubrious lands, and win them imperceptibly from their earliest childhood into resemblance, love, and harmony with the true beauty of reason.[26]

Both Plato and Read stress the importance of the arts in the formation of attitudes. But what guarantee do we have that such attitudes will be rational and desirable? To ensure this, Plato proposed the censorship of the philosopher-kings, and modern democracies acknowledge the formal principles of justice, morality, and the objective verification of knowledge. Read however has only his faith that each man will of his own accord come to formulate these principles organically: an optimism for which we might think history offers little encouragement.

IV

To make these criticisms is not necessarily to depreciate Read's work or to be hostile to his point. Rather, it is to take him seriously and to suppose that he has something of value to say. He seems to have suffered by being accepted uncritically by some of those within art education and by being dismissed equally uncritically by some of those outside it. Criticism is necessary if one is to see the value of his work. Moreover, if the negative aspects of the criticism take as long to say as do the positive, that does not mean that they are as important. It may be only that they are more complex.

Read's work, then, is valuable in the first place because it is a statement of general truths. The most important of these general truths is summed up in the first two sentences of Whitehead's well known essay on the aims of education: "Culture is activity of thought, and receptivity to beauty and humane feeling. Scraps of information have nothing to do with it."[27]

To insist on this is in some circumstances to make a protest, and I have

[26] *Education Through Art*, p. 64.
[27] *The Aims of Education* (New York: New American Library, 1949), p. 13.

said that this is the best way to view Read's work. It is beside the point to object that such a protest is negatively put, for that is the nature of protest. It is true that constructive statements of equal scope and truth may be preferred, but we do not have so many statements of general truths that we can afford to be cavalier with them. Protest is the stuff that classics are made of, at least in education. This is not to say that I would want to claim that ETA, or any other of Read's books on education, has the stature to be called a classic. It is not that they are too extreme — witness the *Republic* and *Émile* — but I think none of them is clear or consistent enough.

Furthermore, Read's protest is by no means an eccentric one. Just as (according to my interpretation) his insistence on the image of the learner as an artist does not have an antiintellectual purpose, so it is not made from outside the gates of society. Though he attacks our developing life-style and denounces a widespread "dissociation of consciousness,"[28] he writes from within a major tradition of our civilization. He calls attention to the image of the artist in education because we appear to ignore it, although we have long been aware of its appropriateness. Similarly he thinks we are in danger of overlooking the fact that moral acts must be freely chosen. Only this aspect makes sense of that other part of the logic of our concept of morality which I have said Read neglects: that moral acts must be seen as falling under rules which are prescriptive and universal. These two together constitute the essence of rational morality, again as we have long known. Read is not, therefore, seeking to depreciate morality but to defend it against an immoral society. One might say the same kind of thing about the publicly verified knowledge of the sciences. He does not expect children to have less science because of his proposed emphasis on the aesthetic. Rather he thinks they will have more because they will better comprehend abstract formulations, having formulated their equivalents themselves.

It is perhaps a familiar message in our time that education implies understanding as well as the simple possession of verbal formulae or external skills. The distinction rests on what seems to be a general fact about people, that they may be unaware of some part of their environment through inattention and can say and do things without being aware of their significance. That is to say, attention is not an automatic reflex but an achievement. It is something that requires effort and in which failure is quite possible. If awareness were automatic, if it did not require effort and could not fail, then the dependence of the dis-

[28] *Education Through Art,* p. 197.

cursive symbols on the nondiscursive, and the reflective levels of mind on the intuitive, would be only a logical truth. Insisting on the distinction would be of little practical importance. But as it is, it is a psychological truth, though one so general that it is easily overlooked. We should be grateful for the energy with which Herbert Read protests our overlooking it.