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CAUSE AND EFFECT

I met Krishnamurti for the first time in 1975, under the broad branches of the majestic pepper tree that stood like a sentinel before his cottage. It was late one afternoon in October, a few weeks after the inauguration of the Oak Grove School. He and Mary Zimbalist had come up to Ojai from Malibu, and he had expressed an interest in meeting the school's main academic teacher.

Krishnamurti's figure was diminutive; his dress was casual but tasteful; and he took my outstretched hand in both of his. His hands were warm and dry to the touch, but so sensitive and delicate that one did not wish to grasp them too firmly. He asked if we had met before, and I said we had not, although I had put a few questions to him from the audience at his public talks in Switzerland three years earlier.

He escorted me into the cottage, and we sat down there with the director of the school, Mark Lee, and two or three others. Krishnamurti asked if we all understood what the school was for—why it had been established—and what was our mission and function there. He touched my arm repeatedly in a gesture

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of reassurance. His manner was warm and friendly, and he said we would meet many times in the months ahead to discuss all the issues associated with the school.

The mission of the school was, in fact, unmistakable. It had been spelled out in black and white in a statement composed by Krishnamurti and was, in any case, apparent from the whole of his philosophy. The school's aim was nothing less than to work a revolution in the consciousness of mankind—to bring about a way of life that was whole, sane, intelligent, and informed with a sense of the sacred. The central element in this intention was to “uncondition” the mind of the student, a process that entailed unconditioning the teacher as well. In this way, a new kind of mind would emerge, one that would affect the consciousness of the world.

The school operated under the auspices of the Krishnamurti Foundation of America, a private, charitable trust designed to facilitate Krishnamurti's speaking schedule and to preserve a complete and authentic record of his work. In its first year, the school had only a handful of students, ranging in age from nine to twelve. Until permanent facilities could be constructed, classes were conducted on the ten-acre property at the far eastern end of the Ojai Valley. There, set amidst orange and avocado groves, were Pine Cottage, an office building, and a large, ranch-style residential structure known as Arya Vihara, Sanskrit for “noble dwelling.” By extension, the entire property was often referred to as Arya Vihara.

Mark Lee, the director of the school, had taught and served for several years as principal of the elementary section at Krishnamurti's Rishi Valley School in Andhra Pradesh, India. Warm and congenial, with an aristocratic bearing, Mark was in

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his late thirties and stood well over six feet tall. He was highly presentable in manners and appearance, and thoroughly devoted to Krishnamurti and the work of the school.

The summer before the school opened, I had been hired by Mark to serve as the main academic teacher. The trajectory of my career at the age of twenty-eight had been somewhat uneven, and I had doubts about my suitability for this role. I had dropped out of a Ph.D. program in political philosophy at UCLA, and my only teaching experience was as a private tutor. On the other hand, my interest in the field of psychology was deep and had been cultivated from adolescence, as well as in my undergraduate years at UC Berkeley. The study of investigators as diverse as Freud, Skinner, Piaget, Maslow, and Ouspensky had perhaps prepared me to appreciate the scope and cogency of Krishnamurti's contribution. In any case, the depth of my interest in his work was, no doubt, the greatest strength I brought to my employment.



Even in its embryonic stages, the school exhibited certain characteristics that were destined to endure for many years. Each morning began with an assembly attended by all the students and staff. Mark Lee or one of the members of the staff would make a short presentation of something he or she had read or realized, designed to inspire and edify young and older alike. Then there would be a moment or two of silence before classes began.

Academic subjects were taught in the morning, art and games in the afternoon. Our aim was excellence in all areas, but the students had their own agendas, which did not always coincide with ours. One young boy named Eli was bright and curious but

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physically as restless as a monkey; he could not be contained in a chair or even in the classroom. Eventually, he squirmed his way out of the school completely.

Lunch was a vegetarian affair, prepared on the premises for the staff. Meat was excluded from the menu as a matter of ethical principle, although students' families were not required to do likewise at home.

At the end of the day, the teachers and students gathered together for a short meeting that Mark called "wrap-up." Any unresolved issues that had arisen during the day were supposed to be addressed and settled before the students went home. But wrap-up rarely had the intended effect. The students were tired and restless and in no mood for civilized discussion. Eventually, the practice was discontinued.

The spacious lawns at Arya Vihara, the orange groves, and the family atmosphere gave the school a sense of charm and even, at times, an enchanted spirit. But I had high expectations for myself, the students, and the school, and was not easily satisfied. The management of classroom behavior is an art that every first-year teacher must master, and some never do. The challenge was exacerbated at Oak Grove by Krishnamurti's philosophy of education: he insisted that the student should feel no sense of compulsion but nevertheless should behave with awareness and consideration for others.

A few weeks after our introduction, my first private meeting with Krishnamurti occurred, this time at my initiative. I wasn't sure how to approach him and asked Mark Lee for guidance. I was told to just knock on the back door of his cottage and see if he was available. I did so late one afternoon and was greeted sweetly by Mary Zimbalist. Mary was a slender woman, middle-aged,

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with exquisite taste, porcelain beauty, and an acute intelligence. In response to my request, she said she would see if Krishnamurti was available. A moment later, he appeared and motioned for me to come in.

The back door of the cottage opened into the kitchen, where a small table and two chairs were situated under a window. We sat down there, and Krishnamurti waited for me to collect myself and state my business. I was too much in awe of the man and my proximity to him to speak freely, but I managed to articulate the essence of the issue that had driven me to seek him out. “What is the law in the classroom?” I inquired.

Krishnamurti’s educational philosophy entailed the radical principle that reward and punishment were equally pernicious as a basis for shaping behavior or cultivating learning. Progressive schools such as Summerhill might forgo punishment as an operating procedure, but simultaneously to renounce “positive” incentives was symptomatic of the uniqueness of Krishnamurti’s approach. What remained unclear to a first-year teacher was what procedures remained, after reward and punishment were abandoned, in the event that misbehavior occurred.

Krishnamurti grasped the meaning and import of my question without any further elaboration. He held his head in his hands for a moment and then began to speak. In paraphrase, he answered along these lines:

The actual misbehaviors the students may exhibit, and my particular responses to them, must not be my primary concern. By the time those behaviors take place, the battle has already been lost. What is needed is to prevent the very possibility of misbehavior before it ever occurs. This requires creating an environment, an atmosphere, that is so special, so orderly, so clearly designed to take

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care of the student in every way, that he or she will immediately recognize it and respond by behaving accordingly. The student's attitude will be, as the British say, that some things simply "aren't done."

To clarify the point, Krishnamurti employed the analogy of smoking cigarettes in a church. There, one often feels the presence of some sacred quality. To smoke cigarettes in that presence would be simply unthinkable. He asked if I could cultivate a similar atmosphere in the classroom.

It was certainly not clear to me that I could cultivate such an atmosphere. I re-directed the conversation back to the terms that made sense to me.

"So, there is no law in the classroom?" I asked. He seemed to shake his head to indicate, "No, there is not," although I gathered that was not really the lesson he wanted me to take away from our conversation.



In late December, Krishnamurti embarked on a series of meetings with teachers and parents designed to articulate in detail the basic principles of the school. Why had it been established? What was the basic nature of the student and of society? What principles should guide educational processes and practices? These meetings occurred on a weekly basis for three months and left an indelible record of Krishnamurti's philosophy and intentions. The meetings were recorded and meticulously transcribed and represent an enduring testament to his vision for the school.

The quality of Krishnamurti's persona was somewhat different on these occasions than it had been in my previous

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encounters with him. These events were more public and more formal, and his attitude and manner were adjusted accordingly. The audience consisted of some thirty or forty parents, teachers, and other members of the school community. They were invited not only to listen but also to participate in a dialogue about the purposes of the school. Krishnamurti took his responsibility most seriously, and that attitude was reflected in the quality of his interaction.

He typically entered the room at the moment the meeting was scheduled to begin. He did not wear a tie, but his clothing was selected with care and good taste. He sat in a folding wooden chair with a cardigan sweater draped over his arm or arranged neatly on his lap. As he sat down, he might glance around the room and smile shyly at a few of those whom he recognized. Whoever was managing the tape recorder that day would approach him and attach a small microphone to his shirt. He would continue to sit for a minute or two, collecting himself and allowing a few latecomers to get settled, before beginning to speak.

Most of the twelve conversations that year began with Krishnamurti articulating an overview of the purpose of the school and the reason for the meeting. But soon the monologue would evolve into an active exchange with members of the audience. These exchanges were often somewhat charged and animated, as Krishnamurti sought with all his energy to convey the meaning and import of the challenge we were facing together.

During the course of these meetings, Krishnamurti presented a set of observations that represent a précis of his entire educational philosophy. Perhaps his foremost principle was that conventional education is far too narrow in its exclusive concern with the accumulation of knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect.