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THE NEED TO KNOW AND THE FEAR OF KNOWING* ¹

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What do we know about this subject? Well, it depends on what we mean by the word "know." If we think in terms of well developed scientific knowledge, sure and certain, repeated and checked, experimentally obtained, repeatable by anybody, then the answer must be "We don't know much."

And yet I must confess that I am convinced that man *does* have a need to know, and more than that, a need to understand, which are profoundly rooted in his biological nature, which, in short, have an instinct-like nature (the word I have coined to describe it is "instinctoid"). I grant very freely that I can't *prove* this adequately, and that I am spinning a theoretical web with insufficient materials. And yet, if you are willing to play the theoretical game with me, the game in which hunches may be used as well as facts, I should like to give you the various bits of data that support my general thesis—and some that *don't* support it. And, to be completely and unconventionally honest about it, I am speaking of convictions which grow out of my direct, primary, personal experience. That is, I know in *myself* the needs to know and to understand. My job is to support this personal experience empirically and objectively.

May I first tell you something of the main sources in my professional experience for this gradually growing conviction.

A. THE EVIDENCE FOR COGNITIVE NEEDS

My story begins in 1932 when I was working with Harry Harlow on delayed reactions in monkeys and became interested in their motivations. Why did they work at this boring problem? It soon became apparent that it wasn't just the *bit* of food that they got as a reward for their patience. They would work almost as successfully for a bit of bread which they didn't much care for, as I knew from a research on their food preferences (14) and on their problem-solving efficiency using more preferred and less preferred foods as a reward (20). Furthermore, often they would successfully solve the problem and then casually throw away the food reward, which, according to the motivation theory of that time, was the *only* reason for working at

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the problem and seeing it through. From conversations about these puzzling happenings emerged Dr. Harlow's suggestion that I try little blocks of wood as a lure instead of food. When I did this it was found that monkeys worked almost as well, though for a shorter period of time. Apparently we could count on the animals to work at these problems and solve them for reasons that had little to do with hunger and food. I remember thinking of Karl Buhler's *Funktionslust* and various additional anthropomorphic explanations; e.g., showing off, enjoying the feeling of success, boredom, etc. and let it go at that.

Later on, Harlow and various of his students in a brilliant series of experiments showed that monkeys would work hard and persistently to solve simple puzzles without any external reward; that is, just for whatever satisfactions are inherent in the puzzle-solving itself. Furthermore, they would also work and learn whatever had to be learned just for the sake of satisfying curiosity. I'll say a little more about these experiments later. (For a good summary see (5).)

My own work thereafter moved in a clinical and theoretical direction. Around 1938, a college girl patient presented herself complaining vaguely of insomnia, lack of appetite, disturbed menstruation, sexual frigidity, and a general malaise which soon turned into a complaint of boredom with life and an inability to enjoy *anything*. Life seemed meaningless for her. Her symptoms paralleled closely those described by Abraham Myerson in his book *When Life Loses Its Zest*. He called the syndrome "anhedonia," the lack of pleasure, following Ribot, I think. As she went on talking, she seemed puzzled. She had graduated about a year ago and by a fantastic stroke of luck—this was the depression, remember—she had immediately gotten a job. And what a job! Fifty dollars a week! She was taking care of her whole unemployed family with this money and was the envy of all her friends. But what was the job? She worked as a sub-personnel manager in a chewing gum factory. And after some hours of talking, it became more and more clear that she felt she was wasting her life. She had been a brilliant student of psychology and was very happy and very successful in college, but her family's financial situation made it impossible for her to go into graduate studies. She was greatly drawn to intellectual work, not altogether consciously at first because she felt that she *ought* to feel fortunate with her job and the money it brought her. Half-consciously then she saw a whole life time of grayness stretching out ahead of her. I suggested that she might be feeling profoundly frustrated and angry simply because she was not being her own very intelligent self, that she was not using her intel-

ligence and her talent for psychology and this might well be a major reason for her boredom with life and her body's boredom with the normal pleasures of life. Any talent, any capacity, I thought, was also a motivation, a need, an impulse. With this she agreed and I suggested that she could continue her graduate studies at night after her work. In brief, she was able to arrange this and it worked well. She became more alive, more happy and zestful and most of her physical symptoms had disappeared at my last contact with her. I made no follow-ups so I don't know anything more about her.

(I should say it was fortunate that I knew so little then about the subtleties of psychopathology and psychotherapy or I would never have dreamed of a diagnosis and a therapy so naive). This successful outcome interested me very much and I continued to suggest this kind of cognitive therapy, this use of the intellect, this cultivation of the search for knowledge whenever it seemed appropriate. Usually this was in exceptionally intelligent individuals, and in such individuals, the therapy worked well in general.

At about this time, another bit of evidence came my way which supported this finding. E. L. Thorndike, and several of his colleagues at Teachers' College had gathered together a group of children with extremely high I.Q.s—over 180, which is simply astronomical. I was told by Dr. Irving Lorge that every single one of this group had spontaneously done research quite early, at no matter what cost. It was his impression that they simply could not be stopped, that their curiosity, persistent and organized, was a need, a hunger, a drive, that it pressed inexorably for expression.

These were the main sources that impelled me for the first time to think of cognitive needs rather than simply of cognitive *capacities*, and to question the age old separation of cognition from conation. I was tempted to assign a conative nature to curiosity and to understanding, an element of desire, drive or need, of a yearning, a longing, demanding satisfaction for the fullest growth of the person, a satisfaction that could be avoided only under peril of pathology and of diminution of the person.²

As I pondered over this possibility, other considerations came to mind.

1. The history of mankind supplies us with a satisfactory number of instances in which men looked for facts and for explanations in the face of the

² From children and from animals, we learn very definitely that primitive curiosity is not *just* within the individual, something within which must express itself, regardless. Their curiosity is an interest in the environment, which pulls, which is fascinating and attractive, which has requiredness and demand-character. Curiosity is transactional, a relationship between a primed organism and an interesting environment, each of which must have a certain nature to set off the transaction. I confine myself here to examination of the vicissitudes of the inner need, but this is only part of the ultimate job.

greatest dangers, even to life itself. There have been innumerable Galileos, whose curiosity led them into dangerous paths. Of course, the ones we know about, the famous ones, the Darwins and the Freuds, permit us only to draw the limited conclusion that this burning curiosity, this need to know certainly comes with great intelligence. We still don't know, however, if this craving is a more universal characteristic of human beings. We may be tempted to think so from the thirst for facts beyond the Iron Curtain and in other authoritarian situations where listening to the radio for news and information is a really dangerous occupation.

2. The yearning for education, however mixed with other motives it may be, is certainly at times a yearning for more knowledge and for more understanding. Certainly we can see this as a usual thing in our most intelligent students. Something similar is seen in many other countries of the world, especially in the newly emancipated, underdeveloped countries. We have no real data here, only impressions, and yet these impressions are very widespread and very strong.

3. Direct examination of psychologically healthy people (15) shows pretty clearly that they are positively attracted to the mysterious, to the unknown, to the puzzling and the unexplained. This is noteworthy because it contrasts sharply with the psychologically sick persons' tendency to be threatened by the unfamiliar, the ambiguous, the unknown. In the extreme instance, for instance in Goldstein's brain-impaired soldiers as well as in Maier's "neurotic" rats, and Harlow's baby monkeys we can see a compulsive and anxious clinging to the familiar and a dread of the novel and unfamiliar, the unexpected. These then seem to be a *loss* of health, of normality rather than "normal" states of affairs. What we find in healthy people is more "normal" than what we find in sick or injured people.

4. I have noticed that many women, even most women perhaps, especially, intelligent, capable, prosperous and unoccupied ones in their middle years, tend to develop, to *some* degree at least, these same symptoms of intellectual starvations (15, p. 96). At Brandeis University, we in the Psychology Department, have tried the experiment with an occasional housewife-mother of arranging graduate studies to her convenience, permitting her to be a mother first and a student second, modifying all our rules and regulations for the purpose. We feel and these women feel that the effects have been good.

5. The needs to know and to understand are seen in infancy and childhood nakedly and openly, perhaps even more strongly than in average adults. *Most* children are dangerously curious. As a matter of fact, the *lack* of curiosity and interest in environment means pathology.

"There seems to be a general agreement (among all trained observers as well as among all parents) that the child shows inquisitive behavior at a very early age and that this behavior can be best explained by some sort of innate drive Most workers agree that after this behavior begins to show, it becomes more and more dominant in the child's behavior until around the age of five when it reaches something of a climax. It typically passes through several stages; first, a sedentary stage involving crawling, walking and climbing progressively; and last, a verbal stage when language functions develop. This stage itself is usually a what, why and finally a who state" (7).

It is a delicate business trying to separate out the "effectance motive" (activity designed to produce changes in the world) from pure "cognizance motives" (gaining information, exploration, manipulation, problem seeking, understanding, knowing), in children at least. The differentiating criterion must be "What satisfies?"

6. Gratification of the cognitive needs is subjectively satisfying and can even yield peak-experiences, e.g., insight in therapy and how good it feels *per se* even when it yields painful results. This kind of satisfaction is life-validating and makes life feel worth while (19). It is the same with intellectual growth in general.

7. Therapy cannot be understood unless we postulate a need to know (as well as a capacity to abstract, the courage to know, satisfaction in knowing, etc.). This must be one element in what is being called the urge to health, the growth tendency which all agree makes therapy possible.

Not only this, but it must be stressed that therapy proves knowledge, insight, truth, reality, facts to be most powerful, curative medicines. This is a well-known fact but its implications are not well worked out. Why is satisfied curiosity curative, why is knowledge medicinal? What kind of illness must it be that can be cured thus? What kind of deficit state? If knowledge can cure, then lack of knowledge can sicken. Repression is a fear of truth, of knowledge, a self-blinding which we shall have to speak of later. In any case, whatever its causes, we must take seriously the fact that blindness, not-knowing, can be sickness-producing and that knowing can be curative. And we must therefore postulate a wanting-to-know that can overcome the fear-of-knowing or absence-of-knowing. Ignorance is a distasteful state. Knowledge does not always come automatically, as to a passive camera-like object; it must often be sought for, even struggled for. And without this struggle, this conative state, this eagerness, psychotherapy is impossible.

The old saw "What you don't know won't hurt you" turns out to be false at a deeper level. Just the contrary is true "It is just what you don't know

that *will* hurt you." What you *don't* know has power over you; knowing it brings it under your control, and makes it subject to your choice. Ignorance makes real choice impossible.

8. One fact that impressed me very much was that a normal result of uncovering psychotherapy is to strengthen and encourage what I have learned to call the basic instinctoid needs, and to weaken or kill off non-basic needs, like neurotic needs, addiction needs. For instance, it should weigh very heavily with us that uncovering psychotherapy *increases* love, courage, creativity and curiosity while it *reduces* fear and hostility. This kind of therapy does not create from nothing; the implication is that it uncovers what was *there* in one form or another.

9. We have some leads from the recent findings of the social psychologists and industrial psychologists that morale is better and functioning is more efficient in complex military and industrial situations when the people involved know what's going on. This means generally knowledge enough to tie in a fragmented, assembly line kind of operation with over-all goals and purposes of the whole operation. To ask people to function blindly, out of sheer faith or submission, doesn't seem to work so well any more in highly developed countries.

Natural childbirth is also an example of the way in which knowledge of what's going on can avoid anxiety and tension.

10. Festinger's work (8) on "cognitive dissonance" can serve as a sample of the kinds of work on cognition that show that when people are presented with illogical or contradictory data, they show a tendency toward a better truth, more consistent, integrated, logical. The same conclusion has been drawn from the work of Bartlett (4) and of Wertheimer (26).

11. There are now available many experiments on all sorts of laboratory animals that pretty well prove that exploration is itself a satisfaction. I think the experiments you will find most interesting are the ones with monkeys. Here I cite two findings only which are sufficient to prove the point. First, monkeys are now known to enjoy puzzles of the same manipulative sort that human youngsters enjoy; e.g., figuring out how to unlock a complicated series of fastenings. This is a real problem-seeking and problem-enjoying of about the same sort seen in humans who play with jig-saw puzzles or crossword puzzles or try to pull apart horseshoe nail puzzles. The enjoyment of puzzles and problems is a *primate* characteristic, not just human.

The other experiment I want to mention demonstrates another kind of curiosity, perhaps of a simpler kind. A monkey locked in a cage completely walled-in will do considerable work for the pleasure of being able to look

through a window for a few seconds at the lab outside. These and other similar experiments are summarized in (5).

12. One recent set of findings helps us to resolve a contradiction that has bothered philosophers for centuries. Through studies of so-called "imprinting," we have learned that even innate reflex systems and instincts can atrophy or die and disappear altogether. Therefore, universality of occurrence of a need or a skill throughout the species is no longer a *necessary* criterion for calling something instinctive. Chickens prevented from pecking early in life can lose the ability to peck, and it may be lost forever beyond the reach of relearning. Animal or human babies not given a chance to suckle in the normal way may lose the ability. Infants not brought up in a loving relation in the first 18 months of life may grow up to be psychopaths, unable to love and not needing love. Puppies, allowed to run loose in packs in the fields beyond a certain point, become "wild," unable forever after to form ties with human beings.

So also for the cognitive urges. Curiosity can die through lack of use, or through being forbidden. Intelligence can go down steadily without cultivation in the abandoned, unloved or institutionalized child. As a matter of fact, it begins to look as if this is rather easily done. "Higher needs" are more susceptible to this kind of atrophy or loss than are "lower needs."

Some folk cultures believe that too much reading or studying softens the brain and brings on insanity. There is some evidence that this kind of belief may help the reduction to the concrete, the loss of abstract ability.

For all these foregoing reasons and also for various reasons arising out of theoretical necessities, I presented in 1943 an general theory of human motivation (15, Chapter 5) which for the first time in the psychological literature so far as I know, spoke about cognitive *needs* on the same basis as the needs for safety, for love, for self-esteem, etc.

I wish, however, to emphasize the similarity between the line of thinking that first led me to postulate basic psychological needs and the line of thinking that led to the discovery of the various vitamins. They were both efforts to trace sickness back to its "causes" or determinants. My theory of human motivation was, in its beginnings anyway, a probing back from psychological illnesses to their origins, and represents in principle, the finding that these illnesses are essentially deficiency diseases, just like the avitaminoses.

B. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

Freud and his followers have postulated various *ad hoc* theories, in the effort to order their clinical findings. The clinical data themselves are clear

and unmistakable. There *is* a huge amount of curiosity and inquisitiveness in the child-in-the-adult, and a good deal of this *is* undoubtedly sexual in origin and in unconscious purpose. Freud himself most often considered them *only* sexual in origin, that is, parts of the broader, more inclusive sexual instinct, although he was not always consistent about this, as when he said "the voice of the intellect is soft but it *will* be heard." I needn't take much time here because I can refer to a fuller treatment by J. Aronoff (3).

Present day analysts ("the ego psychologists"), do postulate sheer curiosity, sheer inquisitiveness without ulterior motive, and find these to be autonomous motives. They go further and speak of the need to order knowledge and to ferret out causality. These pure motives are distinguished from the search for knowledge to allay anxiety—of which I shall speak later—and also accepted are adult curiosity as derivatives and sublimations of partial sexual instincts. Schilder (24, 25) another analyst, quite definitely speaks of cognitive instincts. Hendrick (13) and Adler (2) handle curiosity as a means to the end of power or mastery. Others handle it in still other ways. This is enough to indicate that clinical data in themselves give us no clear unequivocal answer to our problems even though they confirm again and again the sheer facts of curiosity, inquisitiveness and needs to understand and to order knowledge. We must look elsewhere for our answers.

So also for many other theorists whom I won't bother discussing. Better to turn to whatever facts are available.

C. FEAR OF KNOWLEDGE: EVASION OF KNOWLEDGE: PAINS AND DANGERS OF KNOWING

From our point of view, Freud's greatest discovery, the one which lies at the root of psychodynamics, is that *the* great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of knowledge of oneself—of one's emotions, impulses, memories, capacities, potentialities, of one's destiny. We have discovered that fear of knowledge of oneself is very often isomorphic with, and parallel with, fear of the outside world. That is, inner problems and outer problems tend to be deeply similar and to be related to each other. Therefore, we speak simply of fear of knowledge in general, without discriminating too sharply fear-of-the-inner from fear-of-the-outer.

In general this kind of fear is defensive, in the sense that it is a protection of our self-esteem, of our love and respect for ourselves. We tend to be afraid of any knowledge that could cause us to despise ourselves or to make us feel inferior, weak, worthless, evil, shameful. We protect ourselves and our ideal image of ourselves by repression and similar defenses, which are essentially

techniques by which we avoid becoming conscious of unpleasant or dangerous truths. And in psychotherapy the maneuvers by which we continue avoiding this consciousness of painful truth, the ways in which we fight the efforts of the therapist to help us see the truth, we call "resistance." All the techniques of the therapist are in one way or another truth-revealing, or are ways of strengthening the patient so he can bear the truth. ("To be completely honest with oneself is the very best effort a human being can make."—S. Freud.)

But there is another kind of truth we tend to evade. Not only do we hang on to our psychopathology; but also we tend to evade personal growth because this, too, can bring another kind of fear, of awe, of feelings of weakness and inadequacy. And so we find another kind of resistance, a denying of our best side, of our talents, of our finest impulses, of our highest potentialities, of our creativeness. In brief, this is the struggle against our own greatness, the fear of *hubris*.

Here we are reminded that our own Adam and Eve myth, with its dangerous Tree of Knowledge that mustn't be touched, is paralleled in many other cultures who also feel that ultimate knowledge is something reserved for the gods. Most religions have had a thread of anti-intellectualism (along with other threads, of course), some trace of preference for faith or belief or piety rather than for knowledge, or the feeling that *some* forms of knowledge were too dangerous to meddle with and had best be forbidden or reserved to a few special people. In most cultures those revolutionaries who defied the gods by seeking out their secrets, were punished heavily, like Adam and Eve, Prometheus and Oedipus, and remembered as warnings to all others not to try to be god-like.

And if I may say it in a very condensed way, it is precisely the god-like in ourselves that we are ambivalent about, fascinated by and fearful of, motivated to and defensive against. This is one aspect of the basic human predicament, that we are simultaneously worms and gods. Every one of our great creators, our god-like people, has testified to the element of courage that is needed in the lonely moment of creation, affirming something new (contradictory to the old). This is a kind of daring, a going out in front all alone, a defiance, a challenge. The moment of fright is quite understandable but must nevertheless be overcome if creation is to be possible. Thus to discover in oneself a great talent can certainly bring exhilaration but it also brings a fear of the dangers and responsibilities and duties of being a leader and of being all alone. Responsibility can be seen as a heavy burden and evaded as long as possible. Think of the mixture of feelings, of awe, humility, even of fright that have

been reported to us, let us say, by people who have been elected President.

A few standard clinical examples can teach us much. First is the fairly common phenomenon encountered in therapy with women. Many brilliant women are caught up in the problem of making an unconscious identification between intelligence and masculinity. To probe, to search, to be curious, to affirm, to discover all these she may feel as defeminizing, especially if her husband in his uncertain masculinity, is threatened thereby. Many cultures and many religions have kept women from knowing and studying and I feel that one dynamic root of this action is the desire to keep them feminine (in a sado-masochistic sense); for instance, women cannot be priests or rabbis.

The timid man also may tend to identify probing curiosity as somehow challenging to others, as if somehow, by being intelligent and searching out the truth, he is being assertive and bold and manly in a way that he can't back up, and that such a pose will bring down upon him the wrath of other, older, stronger men. So also may children identify curious probing as a trespass upon the prerogatives of their gods, the all-powerful adults. And of course it is even easier to find the complementary attitude in the adults. For often they find the restless curiosity of their children at least a nuisance and sometimes even a threat and a danger, especially when it is about sexual matters. It is still the unusual parent who approves and enjoys curiosity in his children. Something similar can be seen in the exploited, the down-trodden, the weak minority or the slave. He may fear to know too much, to explore freely. This might arouse the wrath of his lords. A defensive attitude of pseudostupidity is common in such groups. In any case, the exploiter, or the tyrant, out of the dynamics of the situation is not likely to encourage curiosity, learning and knowledge in his underlings. People who know too much are likely to rebel. Both the exploited and the exploiter are impelled to regard knowledge as incompatible with being a good, nice, well-adjusted slave. In such a situation, knowledge *is* dangerous, *quite* dangerous.

This dynamic can sometimes be seen, unhappily, even in the class-room. The really bright student, the eager questioner, the probing searcher, especially if he is brighter than his teacher, is too often seen as a "wise guy," a threat to discipline, a challenger of his teachers' authority.

That "knowing" can unconsciously mean domination, mastery, control, and perhaps even contempt, can be seen also from the scopophilia, who can feel some sense of power over the naked women he peeps at, as if his eyes were an instrument of domination that he could use for raping. In this sense, most men are peeping Toms and stare boldly at women, undressing them with their eyes. The biblical use of the word "knowing" as identical with sexual "knowing" is another use of the metaphor.

At an unconscious level, knowing as an intrusive, penetrating into, as a kind of masculine sexual equivalent can help us to understand the archaic complex of conflicting emotions that may cluster around the child's peeping into secrets, into the unknown, some women's feeling of a contradiction between femininity and boldly knowing, of the underdog's feeling that knowing is a prerogative of the master, of the religious man's fear that knowing trespasses on the jurisdiction of the gods, is dangerous and will be resented.

D. KNOWLEDGE FOR ANXIETY-REDUCTION AND FOR GROWTH

So far I have been talking about the need to know for its own sake, for the sheer delight and primitive satisfaction of knowledge and understanding *per se*. It makes the person bigger, wiser, richer, stronger, more evolved, more mature. It represents the actualization of a human potentiality, the fulfillment of that human destiny foreshadowed by human possibilities. We then have a parallel to the unobstructed blooming of a flower or to the growing of trees. This is the way in which an apple tree bears apples, without striving or effort, simply as an expression of its own inherent nature.

But we know also that curiosity and exploration are "higher" needs than safety, which is to say that the need to feel safe, secure, unanxious, unafraid is prepotent, stronger than curiosity. Both in monkeys and in human children this can be openly observed. The young child in a strange environment will characteristically hang on to its mother and only then, venture out little by little from her lap to probe into things, to explore and to probe. If she disappears and he becomes frightened, the curiosity disappears until safety is restored. He explores only out of a safe harbor. So also for Harlow's baby monkeys. Anything that frightens sends them fleeing back to the mother-surrogate. Clinging there, he can first observe and *then* venture out. If she is not there, he may simply curl up into a ball and whimper. Harlow's motion pictures show this very clearly.

The adult human being is far more subtle and concealed about his anxieties and fears. If they do not overwhelm him altogether, he is very apt to repress them, to deny even to himself that they exist. Frequently, he does not "know" that he is afraid.

There are many ways of coping with such anxieties and some of these are cognitive. To such a person, the unfamiliar, the vaguely perceived, the mysterious, the hidden, the unexpected are all apt to be threatening. One way of rendering them familiar, predictable, manageable, controllable; i.e., unthreatening, and harmless is to know them and to understand them. And so knowledge may have not only a growing-forward function, but also an anxiety-reducing

function, a protective, homeostatic function. The overt behavior may be very similar, but the motivations may be extremely different. On the one hand we have the sigh of relief, or the feeling of lowered tension, let us say, of the worried householder exploring a mysterious and frightening noise down-stairs in the middle of the night with a gun in his hand, who discovers the noise to be harmless. This is quite different from the illumination and exhilaration, even the ecstasy, of a young student looking through a microscope who sees for the first time the minute structure of the kidney, or who suddenly understands the structure of a symphony or the meaning of an intricate poem or political theory. In the latter instances, one feels bigger, smarter, stronger, fuller, more capable, successful, more perceptive. Supposing our sense organs were to become more efficient, our eyes suddenly keener, our ears unstopped, then this is how we would feel. And I should tell you that this is what can happen in education and in psychotherapy—and *does* happen often enough.

This motivational dialectic can be seen on the largest human canvasses, the great philosophies, the religious structures, the political and legal systems, the various sciences, even the culture as a whole. To put it very simply, *too* simply, they can represent simultaneously the outcome of the need to understand and the need for safety in varying proportions. Sometimes the safety needs can almost entirely bend the cognitive needs to their own anxiety-allaying purposes. The anxiety-free person can be more bold and more courageous and can explore and theorize for the sake of knowledge itself. It is certainly reasonable to assume that the latter is more likely to approach the truth, the real nature of things. A safety-philosophy or religion or science is more apt to be blind than a growth-philosophy, religion or science.

E. THE AVOIDANCE OF KNOWLEDGE AS AVOIDANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Anxiety and timidity not only bend curiosity and knowing and understanding to their own ends, *using* them so to speak, as *tools* for allaying anxiety; but also the lack of curiosity can be an active or a passive *expression* of anxiety and fear. (This is not the same as the atrophy of curiosity which I have already discussed.) That is, we can seek knowledge in order to reduce anxiety and we can also *avoid* knowing in order to reduce anxiety. To use Freudian language, incuriosity, learning difficulties, or pseudo-stupidity can be a defense. Knowledge and action are very closely bound together, all agree. I go much further, and am convinced that knowledge and action are frequently synonymous, identical in the Socratic fashion. Where we know fully and completely, suitable action follows automatically and reflexly. Choices are then made without conflict, with full spontaneity.

This we see at a high level in the very healthy person who seems to know what is right and wrong, good and bad, and shows this in his easy, full functioning. But we see this at another level altogether in the young child (or in the child hidden in the adult) for whom thinking about an action can be the same as having acted, "the omnipotence of thought," the psychoanalysts call it. That is, if he has had a wish for the death of his father, he may react unconsciously as if he had actually killed him. In fact, one function of adult psychotherapy is to de-fuse this childish identity so that the person need not feel guilty about childish thoughts as if they had been deeds.

In any case, this close relation between knowing and doing can help us to interpret one cause of the fear of knowing as deeply, a fear of doing, a fear of the consequences that flow from knowing, a fear of its dangerous responsibilities. Often it is better not to know, because if you *did* know, then you would *have* to act and stick your neck out. This is a little involved, a little like the man who said, "I'm so glad I don't like oysters. Because if I liked oysters, I'd eat them, and I *hate* the darn things."

It was certainly safer for the Germans living near Dachau not to know what was going on, to be blind and pseudo-stupid. For if they knew, they would either have had to do something about it or else feel guilty about being cowards.

The child too can play this same trick, denying, refusing to see what is plain to anyone else; that his father is a contemptible weakling, or that his mother doesn't really love him. This kind of knowledge is a call for action which is impossible. Better not to know.

In any case, we now know enough about anxiety and cognition to reject the extreme position that many philosophers and psychological theorists have held for centuries, that *all* cognitive needs are instigated by anxiety and are *only* efforts to reduce anxiety. For many years, this seemed plausible, but now our animal and child experiments contradict this theory in its pure form, for they all show that, generally, anxiety *kills* curiosity and exploration, that they are mutually incompatible, especially when anxiety is extreme. The cognitive needs show themselves most clearly in safe and non-anxious situations.

A recent book summarizes the situation nicely.

The beautiful thing about a belief system is that it seems to be constructed to serve both masters at once: to understand the world insofar as possible, and to defend against it insofar as necessary. We do not agree with those who hold that people selectively distort their cognitive functioning so that they will see, remember and think only what they

want to. Instead, we hold to the view that people will do so only to the extent that they have to and no more. For we are all motivated by the desire which is sometimes strong and sometimes weak, to see reality as it actually is, even if it hurts (22, p. 400).

F. SUMMARY³

I have certainly presented enough evidence to force us to take seriously my thesis that we do have a need to know, however weak it may be, and furthermore that this may very well have an instinct-like nature. It seems also quite clear that this need to know, if we are to understand it well, must be integrated with fear of knowing, with anxiety, with needs for safety and security. We wind up with a dialectical back and forth relationship which is simultaneously a struggle between fear and courage. All those psychological and social factors that increase fear will cut our impulse to know; all factors that permit courage, freedom and boldness will thereby also free our need to know.

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³ After this paper was completed I was given the opportunity to read an excellent unpublished manuscript on *The Need to Know* by H. Powdermaker and Z. DeFries, a clinical study of the psychopathology and psychotherapy of the need to know. I have made no effort to rewrite my paper to incorporate what I learned from their manuscript. Instead I urge the interested reader to look for it when it appears in print. I would also refer the reader to Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, Free Press, 1961, p. 112 for an excellent account of the way in which the effort to understand protected Bettelheim against disintegration in a concentration camp.

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