

Life as a Game and Stage Performance (Role Playing) & Cheerfulness (A Psychosynthetic Technique)

LIFE As A GAME AND STAGE PERFORMANCE—(ROLE-PLAYING)
ROBERTO ASSAGIOLI, M.D.

As a rule, we live life more or less as it comes. Yet the business of living is in reality an art and should be the greatest of all the arts.

Every art has its specific techniques; likewise the art of living has its own techniques, and mastering them is indispensable in practicing it successfully. One such technique is to consider life as a game and stage performance. To deal with play is not easy. The concept of play is complex, many-faceted and elusive to the extent that it could be said to play hide-and-seek with whoever tries to pin it down and define it. Huizinga, in his book *Homo Ludens* (Gallimard, Paris, 1951) lists a number of views held by various writers on the subject. Thus, play has been considered:

1. A means of discharging an excess of vitality;
2. A way of meeting the need for relaxation;
3. A training in preparation for some serious activity;
4. A means for developing self-control;
5. A medium for dominating others;
6. An outlet for the drive to compete;
7. A harmless method of discharging harmful tendencies;
8. A compensatory activity;
9. A fictitious and imaginary substitute for the gratification of unattainable desires.

Each of the above views emphasizes an aspect of games, but each is partial, and this fact calls for a preliminary observation: The *functions* of a game are to be distinguished from its *nature*. In fact, the same activity is or is not a "game" according to the *psychological attitude*, the intention, the purpose that motivates the "player." Sport offers a clear example of this. Etymologically considered, and in its pure nature and original meaning, sport is play, *ludus*, something done for diversion. But nowadays many people go in for sport in an increasingly "serious" way, and for motives such as ambition or financial reward, which are inconsistent with its intrinsic nature. It thus loses the quality of play and takes on the character of work. When it becomes a profession, sport is no longer truly sport. In reality there is no clear dividing line between "play" and "non-play," or more precisely that, in any ostensibly playful activity, the proportion of what is play and what is "serious" (in the strict sense of the word) is a variable. Indeed it can change during the course of the activity itself. This is brought out clearly in the case of children who, beginning to fight in fun, get angry and come to blows in earnest. Gambling provides a striking example in which the high proportion of the seriousness tends to minimize the game element. Where the urge to gamble has become an overwhelming, obsessive passion, the "play" aspect disappears.

A true, sporting attitude aims at "playing well" rather than at winning. They are two different things: winning can depend upon a number of contingent factors such as an opponent's inferior skill or favourable conditions of some kind or another. The same applies to losing. The genuine sportsman is not bent on winning at the expense of style, good form and fair play. And, as in other fields of human endeavour, freedom from worry whether one wins or not can contribute to victory!

Much more could be added on the subject of games-playing and its functions in education, psychotherapy and psychosynthesis, but I shall confine myself to discussing one particular aspect of play, interpreted in its widest sense, that is, as a performance, or acting. Play and acting have both affinities and differences. One affinity is indicated by the fact that several languages, besides English, use a word that stands for to play, as well as to act in a theatrical production. The French *jouer* and the German *spielen* are examples. The differences will appear as the exposition proceeds.

To act a part or role in life, in fact several ones, constitutes a psychosynthetic technique of fundamental importance. It can indeed be considered as the pivotal technique of the art of living, with which all the others are linked and on which, in a certain sense, they are dependent. At first, this claim might occasion surprise and even be thought as shocking, as too frivolous an attitude. Yet dispassionate observation of ourselves and others, unclouded by preconceptions and illusions, reveals—indeed forces upon us the recognition—that every one of us performs, or "acts" a variety of "parts" in life. This is inevitable, and such roles constitute the "plot" of our interpersonal and social relations. But most of the time we act our parts unconsciously without being aware of them and we perform them poorly, unskillfully, like bad amateur actors. Among primitive peoples and in ancient civilizations, play and theatrical performances had a sacred character and were regarded as the way in which the Gods acted. In continuance of this tradition, the Passion Play of the Middle Ages has survived until today in some places, such as Oberammergau, while other towns have revived it, as has Grassano, near Florence. The history of this sacred character of "performing" is abundantly documented in Huizinga's book.

Also, Wagner conferred a profound significance and spiritual purpose on the musical theatre. He styled some of his musical dramas "Bühnenweihespiele," that is, sacred (or consecrated) and joyous performances.

The conception of life as a stage performance is an ancient and widespread one. While this is not the occasion to trace its historical background, one or two points about it have a special relevance in this context. The cosmic manifestation itself has been seen as a game, a performance, a divine dance. Thus, the "Dance of Shiva" appears frequently in sculptures in Indian temples. The Bible, a work of great solemnity, contains the passage: "Deus ludit in orbe terrarum."

A sonnet of the philosopher Tommaso Campanella is in similar vein. Here are its beginning and end:

"In the theatre of the world, our souls play a masquerade, Hiding themselves behind their bodies and their effects."

"When at the end we render up our masks to earth and sky and sea, In Cod we shall discern who did and said the better thing."

The modern Russian writer and dramatist, Nicholas Evreinoff, has emphasized this aspect of life in his book, *The Theatre of Life*, in which he dwells at length on what he terms the "theatrical instinct." In addressing himself to "My God Playwright," he says:

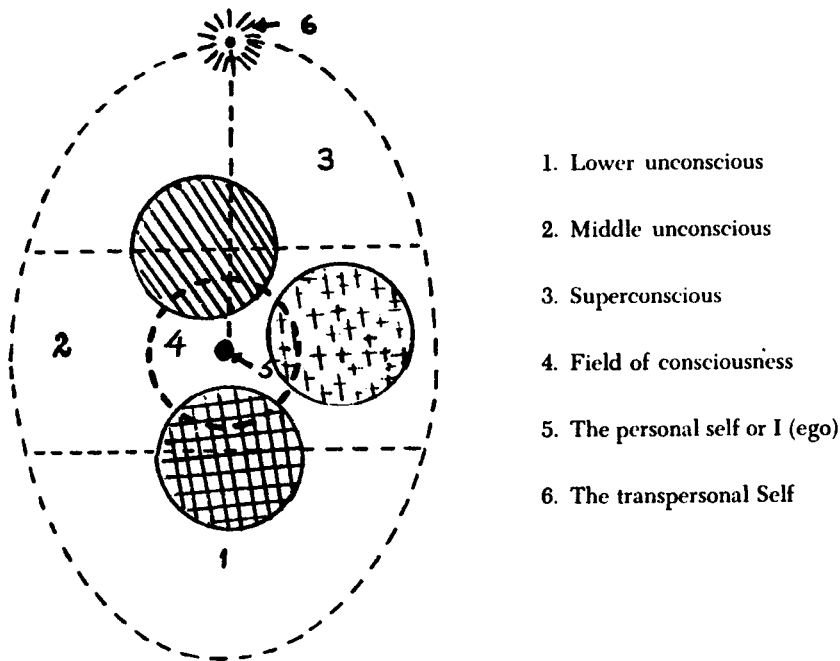
"My face and body are but masks and costume with which the Heavenly Father has clothed my Ego before ushering it upon the stage of this world, where it is destined to play a given part. This rime, the part entrusted to me by my cosmic Producer, Playwright, is a difficult one. Yet, I shall neither neglect my duty nor complain. As befits a noble and therefore a loyal actor, I shall summon all my forces and play my part upon this stage as best as I can. And I am sure that the Playwright will not fail to reward my efforts."

In several of his plays Pirandello has exploited this theme, but his approach is pessimistic. He features the fictitious, illusory and dramatic aspects of the interplay between roles. Hermann Keyserling, on the contrary, in the twelfth of his *South American Meditations*, significantly entitled "Divine Comedy," (Hermann Keyserling-Méditations Sud-Américaines-Paris: Stock, 1932.) has interpreted more profoundly than any other author the relations between game, performance and real life.

As a technique of Psychosynthesis, the art of acting in life is founded on the psychological structure of the human being. This is described in my book, *Psychosynthesis (Psychosynthesis, A Manual of Principles and Techniques*-New York: Hobbs, Dorman, 1965. Paper back Edition-N.Y.: Viking Press, 1971.)

The production of a play in the theatre requires contributions from three principal agents and their mutual collaboration: the *author*, the *director* and the *actors*. In the case of the "play" which each one of us has to perform on the stage of life, the author is, or should be, the Higher or Transpersonal Self. He selects the theme, the task or—better—the play the personality is to undertake and the parts it should "impersonate." It is to be noted that as a rule this takes place without any clear awareness on the part of the ego, or "I," since the Transpersonal Self operates from the level of the superconscious. The conscious "I," the center of consciousness, is the *director*. His function is to *carry out* the life plan, which is revealed to the "I" by degrees, through inspiration, inner promptings and the unfolding of life's circumstances. The success of the production depends in large measure on the director, on his grasp of the play's plot and situations, on his acceptance of them and on the care and skill with which he directs his cast. Who are these actors? They are the various sub-personalities created by each and every human being during the course of his life.

In the diagram below, three sub-personalities are depicted. The central circle represents the area of the conscious "I," into which a part of each sub-personality penetrates, while its greater part operates on one of the unconscious levels.



It should be observed, however, that the respective areas of the unconscious depicted as occupied are not fixed in extent, each subpersonality being able to "rise" or "descend" during the activity in which it is engaged. Moreover, each level accommodates not only one sub-personality (as shown in the diagram for the sake of clarity) but a variety of them.

Each sub-personality performs its specific function; that is to say, it plays its own "part" in family and social life. The family creates the "parts" of son or daughter, of husband or wife, of father or mother. In the milieu of society the "parts" correspond to a person's occupation or professional role, to the various public capacities in which he may serve.

Expanding the theatrical analogy, let us examine first of all the *author-director* relationship, i.e. the rapport between the Transpersonal Self and the conscious "I." These relations are very varied. Unfortunately, until a certain stage in the development of the individual is reached, this relationship is usually warped by lack of understanding, misinterpretations, resistance and conflicts on the part of the "I." This stage gradually can give place to the recognition by the conscious "I" that it is in its own interest to understand the "Author's" intention, to put himself in accord with the Self and to cooperate with Him.

Then there are the relations between *director and actors*. The success of the "production" depends upon the director's ability and authority in carrying out his specific responsibilities: training the actors how best to interpret their parts, plotting their interactions, etc. In terms of life, this corresponds to the work of the conscious "I" in developing, training and harmonizing its various sub-personalities so that they learn the art of cooperating with one another.

Then come the "rehearsals." They correspond to the "imaginative training" that should be undergone prior to performing any "part" in life. Such "rehearsals" have a function akin to that of play as a preparation for life; this is a method that should be employed much more—and especially so in family and school education.

From a somewhat different angle, one of the most important and illuminating aspects of the analogy between acting and life concerns the relations between the *personality of the actor*, as a human being, man or woman, and the characters he sequentially "impersonates," his "mask" in a psychological sense. This brings up an important and much discussed question. How far should an actor identify himself with the *character* he is playing? Or should he keep himself psychologically—that is, emotionally—detached from the part so as to enable him to apply his full technical resources to the control of his interpretation? Which method makes for the best actor?

Diderot aroused lively discussions about this question with the position he took in his book, *The Paradox of the Comedian*. He maintained that "extreme sensitivity (in an emotional sense) makes for a mediocre actor, while its total absence contributes to making a sublime one." Dogmatically expressed like that, it has incurred much criticism, and has formed the subject of scientific research. Among various investigators, Professors Marzi and Vignoli addressed a questionnaire to eighteen prominent Italian actors, and published the results of their survey in an article, *The Expression of the Emotions on the Stage* (Published in the "Rivista di Psicologia"-1944-1945.). These indicated that the extent to which actors involved themselves in the emotional content of the characters they play varies widely. Some of them replied that they experience a partial identification with the character. According to Renzo Ricci, the emotion that an actor feels on the stage is relatively similar to the real emotions, with their psychosomatic reactions. He states that:

"After preparing himself, the actor is in the character, or the character is in him. The fusion is not complete however...until the most dramatic moments, in which the actor does abandon himself completely to the role of the character."

Others declared that during their performances they maintain an attitude of observation and criticism, and a clear awareness of themselves. Anna Proclemer indeed goes further in saying:

"The actor must feel the character, but not during the performance, when a control must be established that precludes any surrender to emotion."

A few, like Ruggero Ruggeri and Elena da Venezia, speak of a split and Anna Torrieri's observation carries particular significance in this connection:

"Always to control oneself in any of life's emergencies, to habituate oneself to a continuous control, leads to control in the theatre becoming habitual, when the part will be lived with the balance and self-control that characterize real life."

It would be more realistic to say "should characterize"

Thus, these actors keep their individual self-conscious awareness distinct, albeit in various degrees, from the parts they play in the theatre. By means of the ability to preserve a state of self-observation and self-control, they establish a dichotomy between the part of them that observes and directs and the one which acts, and thus achieve a disidentification. Their statements are significant because they are spontaneous and represent the fruit of personal experience rather than opinions garnered from technical psychological research.

Let us now examine how all this may be applied to the functions we perform in life, and what conclusions we may draw from it. In this sphere too we may observe that the degrees of identification of "actor" with "part" vary widely. In general, one "lives" one's roles "instinctively" (employing the word in the usual and not the scientific sense), that is to say at the behest of inner impulses or by reactions or responses to external stimuli and conditioning. This fact provides the basis for the psychological conceptions which regard human beings as activated by needs, drives and conditioned reflexes. These conceptions, in which the behaviourist and reflexological theories are rooted, are extremely one-sided in that they take account only of what is least "human" in man's make-up. Yet they must be given the credit for having thrown light on this aspect of human nature, and by making us aware of it, helping us—intentionally or even unintentionally—to cope with it.

It is true that the vast majority of men and women allow themselves to be so controlled by their "parts," and often are so carried away by them, that they have virtually no autonomous, genuine, self-conscious life apart from them. Typical examples are to be seen in those women who identify themselves entirely with their maternal function, and in those men who feel they are truly themselves and important only when exercising their function as commanding officer, magistrate, managing director, and so forth. There are also those who identify themselves with their possessions. A French landowner went so far as to say: "I am my land!"

Important reasons exist, however, for not identifying ourselves too closely with a single part or a single function. If we restrict ourselves to one role, totally committing ourselves to it and concentrating all our interest in it, we severely limit our capacity to attend adequately to other functions which we must perform as well. The public official, the professional man who devotes all his forces to his work will have little time and energy left to attend properly to his function as husband or father. Similarly, the woman who identifies herself wholly with her maternal function will not be able to properly fulfill her role as wife, and will risk the atrophying of her potentialities for experience and expression as a human being in the social milieu. Furthermore, when the performance of the function to which a person has devoted himself almost exclusively is made impossible by force of circumstances (illness, age, loss or separation from marriage partner or children) a serious crisis may ensue, a collapse leading to psychosomatic illness or even suicide. In contrast, a person who has acquired skill in distributing his vital interests, inner attention and energies among the parts which life has called upon him to play, and which he has voluntarily accepted, will be in a position to find

compensations and in some cases even to make active use of talents and undertake activities that up to now he has neglected or had to put on one side.

On the other hand, there are those people who maintain constant self-observation during their activities, and subject themselves to frequent self-criticism. Some indeed practice this to excess, thereby allowing their self-analysis and criticism to inhibit or even paralyze action. These are among the extreme introverts.

There are also those who consciously play a part for utilitarian purposes, for deceiving and exploiting or for amusement. But this should not encourage the belief that an instinctive way of living is the only genuine one, and every conscious "performance" a sham. This false notion might be termed the "fallacy of misconceived sincerity," since it equates sincerity with uncontrolled impulsiveness.

There is instead a manner of "acting" in life which is not only as genuine and real, but is so in a higher way, and which at times may constitute a duty.

In a general way the difference between the two styles of life can be compared to the difference between nature and art. One style is living "naturally," according to the dictates of instinct, the other exercising the *art of living*, or living as art." The right relationship between the two ways is synthetically expressed in the saying; "Art is based on nature, but improves it." From another point of view it may be said that the genuine, and therefore the human, ethical and spiritual value of our conduct lies in the *intention* which animates it, in the goal towards which it is directed, and finally in the *wisdom and technical skill* which informs our actions.

Let us now apply what has been said to describing the method which can guide one in giving a good "performance" of his or her "part" on the world stage. The essential step consists in our getting acquainted with our true being, with our Self, with what we *really* are. But in order to achieve this, we have to make a voyage of discovery in order to ascertain the various elements that comprise our personality, to become acquainted with the "anatomy" and "psychology" of our psychological structure. This is the real meaning of the age-old but always topical injunction: "Know thyself." Its accomplishment demands the disidentification of ourselves from the many contents of our psyche and from our various sub-personalities. This enables us to recognize ourself as pure "self-conscious and permanent identity": both the personal (self-awareness) and transpersonal, or spiritual Self.

There is an exercise, *The Exercise of Disidentification and Self-identification*, which is of much help in cultivating this attitude of "detached observer." (It is described in my book "*Psychosynthesis; A Manual of Principles and Techniques*"-Chapter IV, page 116.)

The second phase is that in which the existing sub-personalities are transformed and trained by the "director." It is to this stage that the two other "passwords" adopted by psychosynthesis refer: *Possess thyself and Transform thyself*. All psychosynthetic techniques have this as their goal.

But what, one may ask, is the degree—the percentage, so to speak—of partial identification during action? This varies widely according to the kind of action and the *psychological type* of the person concerned; but in every case an optimal proportion exists and can be found and adopted. A general rule to apply when a new function or skill is being developed is to devote the maximum attention to it at the outset, learning it and performing it to the best of one's ability. Practice progressively reduces the need for attending closely to its performance, as control of it is gradually taken over by the unconscious, while the quality of performance improves, with less and less emotional involvement. This is analogous to the way in which actors, becoming increasingly familiar with their role in a play, can afford to decrease their personal involvement in it. There is also an effective method, analogous to the rehearsals of a play, which consists in preparatory action by means of the exercise in "Imaginative Training."

The use of all these methods, however, presupposes a clear and stable self-consciousness, the employment of a firm and decisive will, and a constant sense of self-awareness, both as subject and, at the same time, as agent. This attitude can be taken at the level of the personal "I," the ego, but the most effective way is to establish contact and a relationship with the Transpersonal Self, of which the personal "I" is an emanation, or reflection. From this higher Reality, we can constantly draw light and strength needed for resisting every inner and external attraction, every enticement and inducement which seek to divert us from our task: to give the best performance we are capable of in playing the part allotted to us, or chosen by us, in the great human drama.

CHEERFULNESS (A PSYCHOSYNTHETIC TECHNIQUE)'
ROBERTO AssAGIOLI, M.D.

This subject may occasion some surprise and make the reader wonder how cheerfulness, which is a state of mind, or inner attitude, can be considered a "technique." I hope to show that cheerfulness can indeed be a technique or, more precisely, can be stimulated, developed and maintained by means of psychological exercises. How greatly it is needed, especially nowadays! This subject has a direct connection with that of the *Will*.

The last remark requires a clarification. It may be objected that cheerfulness is a state of mind which one either has or has not; it cannot be artificially generated by means of the will. This objection raises the whole problem of the relationships between the will and the other psychological functions and activities in general, and with the emotions and feelings in particular. It is true that a change in a state of mind cannot be brought about by a *direct imposition* of the will. A peremptory and repressive imposition of the will is apt to arouse contrary reactions and fail in its purpose. This is the error of authoritarian moralists and educators who use methods based on prohibitions, threats, condemnation and punishment. In contrast, the application of appropriate psychological techniques, guided by an enlightened and *skillful* will, can act powerfully on all the psychological functions and can change the bent of a state of mind. I shall endeavour to demonstrate this in regard to cheerfulness.

A theoretical definition of cheerfulness is unnecessary. Everyone knows, more or less, what it is. Besides, in the psychological field definitions serve little purpose, since knowledge of psychological facts is principally arrived at through direct experience. On the other hand, it may be helpful to indicate some of the characteristics of cheerfulness and comment briefly on its associations with other states of mind and inner activities.

Cheerfulness has close links and affinities with humour. I have spoken about the nature of humour and its uses in the monograph, *Smiling Wisdom*. Speaking playfully, one may call cheerfulness a "younger brother" of humour: one tends to arouse the other and encourage its appearance. But they are quite different, as is revealed by the fact that there can be humour without cheerfulness and cheerfulness devoid of humour. The latter can be satirical, ironical, sometimes even biting. Cheerfulness, by contrast, is serene, good natured, and smiling.

Similarly, cheerfulness can be considered *joy's* younger brother. Cheerfulness opens the way to joy and promotes its manifestations. Conversely, joy includes the state of mind which is cheerfulness. (I shall refer to this later when dealing with Franciscan joy).

Again, cheerfulness has close associations with play. Play promotes cheerfulness and this in turn encourages play.

Let us now examine the practical issue: how can cheerfulness be stimulated, cultivated and maintained? There are two groups of methods. In one group are the techniques for eliminating the obstacles to its expression; in the other, those which aim at evoking it

directly. Irritation constitutes one of the major obstacles. But fighting irritation with a intervention of the will does not work or, if it does succeed momentarily, can have harmful effects and produce violent reactions. The most direct way to eliminate irritation, and the hostility and aggressive impulse associated with it, is to discharge it by means of harmless activities having a symbolic meaning: such as wood-splitting, tearing up newspapers and the like, thumping a bed or punching a ball. A more reliable and I would say cultivated way of doing this is that described in a recent Reader's Digest article by A. and S. Mydans, *But What Sort of People Are These Japanese?*

"In Japan much importance is attached to group and individual self-control. The ultra-modern Matsushita Electric plant maintains a room reserved for workpeople who harbor repressed feelings, where they can go and regain self-control. Anyone who feels the need can leave his work for this purpose, and fifteen or twenty people make use of the room daily. It contains two dummies covered in heavy canvas, and sticks to beat them with. The smaller of the dummies has become so battered that the metal framework forming the head is visible through the straw stuffing, and the stomach has a large hole in the covering. The dummy does not represent a superior, but the self of the striker."

Another way of discharging irritation is to write recriminating, critical, even abusive letters to people who have aroused our hostility, and then not mail them. All these ways are effective because symbolic satisfactions are as gratifying as real ones.

The method used in Japan has an additional value in that it allows irritation and hostility towards ourselves to surface and then discharge them. This has real importance since an associated unconscious mechanism can easily inflict self-punishment that may develop extreme forms. It is, in reality, a question of reactions against a *part* of ourselves which we should like to be without. To objectify it in a dummy is a good way of achieving freedom from it.

But direct or better methods are available after, or besides, the application of the discharge method. It may be said that discharge eliminates the irritation of the moment, but to get at its roots one can proceed as follows: first of all examine critically and reflect on the harmful effects anger has on us. They have been defined thus: "Anger is the price we pay for the faults of others." The recognition of the uselessness of anger is tersely expressed in the Chinese saying: "If there's a remedy, why get angry? If there isn't, what is the use of getting angry?"

Criticism is one of the ways of expressing hostility. Having spoken of this on other occasions, I will limit myself here to quote what Henry Ford said: "Don't find defects, find remedies. All of us can complain." Much of our ill-humour, much of our suffering and unhappiness, originate in other people's criticism, because of the importance we attach to their opinion of us. This is really one of the most useless things to do. We shall often come in for criticism, so it is better to know and accept it from the start! A Buddhist text, the *Dhammapada*, which dates from several centuries B.C., states: "This is an old saying O Atula! They criticize those who speak, they criticize those who are silent, even

those who speak little are criticized, no one in the world goes uncensored." Another saying which helps to conquer this tendency: "They say. What do they say? Let them say!". And finally an Eastern proverb: "The dogs bark, the caravan passes."

An effective manner of achieving an attitude of non-reaction, both external and inner, towards those who are hostile, or who are regarded as enemies, is to recognize how *useful* they are. As Inayat Khan has said: "My friends send me to sleep, my enemies keep me awake." Adler was a psychotherapist who devoted himself particularly to the promotion of right human relations by means of eliminating hostile self-assertion. He wrote these fine words: "My enemies have always blessed me. When they don't fight my ideas they go away with them and claim they are theirs, but in this way they give them wider dissemination. Whether what I believe I have discovered is called Freudian or not, is of no concern to me. I believe it to be true and of permanent usefulness to humanity and that makes me happy." So let us then recognize the utility of "enemies." Besides, animosity takes two; if someone is my enemy and I am not his enemy, there is no animosity.

Another serious obstacle to cheerfulness is *commiseration* with *one-self*. In other words, *self-pity*. Widespread and harmful, it is frequently accompanied by an unhealthy sense of complacency. It provides the soil from which spring other negative reactions: envy, resentment, revengeful impulses. Self-pity may be fought and eliminated by recognizing the painful nature of the universal human condition, and especially by thinking of the great number of human beings who are suffering much more than we are (the sick, the prisoners, the isolated and the destitute). The lines of the Italian playwright, Metastasio, express in a simple way a great truth: "If anguish were written on the forehead, many who are envied would arouse pity."

Another obstacle to cheerfulness, which is minor but still very common, is *impatience*. A Chinese saying expresses it thus: "Seeing an egg, one expects to hear it sing." Thus one of the psychological techniques to develop is the "art of waiting."

A major obstacle to cheerfulness is *worry*. Much can be said about this matter as well, but I cannot do so on this occasion. The idea is well expressed in the saying: "Today is that tomorrow you were worrying about so much yesterday."

Among other obstacles to cheerfulness, not for all but for many, is attachment to sadness, a finding satisfaction in sadness. Apart from personal causes of this form of rejection of cheerfulness, there are a number of shared or cultural causes which must be clearly seen if they are to be removed. One is a philosophical negativism which conceives of man as alienated, as the victim of outside forces, as doomed to suffering and as doing right when he suffers more, thereby acknowledging with clear eyes, his wretched state. According to this line of reasoning, since suffering is man's lot, self-conscious suffering is the most heroic and intellectually honest way to conduct one's life. The advocacy of such a position is based on certain assumptions which, while erroneous, are conceived to be axiomatic. Fortunately, however, such mistaken lines of thought are passing out of currency as more and more people begin to see the existence of a natural communion between man and various aspects of reality: I refer to a range of trends from the ecology

movement on the one hand to the interest in Eastern religions on the other. As far as man's own conception of himself, humanistic psychology and the more positive varieties of existentialism are helping to open man's perspective to the positive and creative forces within him.

At this point it is fair to recognize that, as with all other good qualities, cheerfulness can be overdone and inappropriate. Life holds serious situations, heavy suffering, human problems, individual and collective, which cheerfulness cannot solve. They must be considered and faced with due earnestness, but such earnestness *should be reserved only for them*. We are apt to take so many things seriously, which do not warrant it. We fritter away, so to speak, our capital of seriousness so that there is not enough for the truly important things. So the rule is: Seriousness in everything that deserves and demands it, and for the rest, *cheerfulness*.

We come now to the active techniques for the development of cheerfulness. The general method is to cultivate the states of mind and feeling which are the antithesis of those which block it, and also to encourage those which directly express it. As in the case of all other qualities which we desire to develop, it is a matter of opening oneself to influences which emanate the desired qualities. Just as we can expose ourselves to beneficial physical influences, air, sunlight, ultraviolet rays, etc., so we may and should open ourselves *intentionally* to beneficial psychological and spiritual forces. There are numerous ways of doing this. The simplest and easiest is to read appropriate books or listen to appropriate music. There are plenty of books which are likely to evoke cheerfulness, among them P. G. Wodehouse's novels, full of pungent but good-natured humour. The author plays on the comic aspects, the weakness and stupidity of a wide range of characters in the "human comedy." With smiling impartiality, he makes peers and commoners, girls and young men in love, artists and intellectuals, editors and gangsters, English, American, French, take the stage. Particular mention should be made of *Leave it to Psmith*, in which the hero circulates among those characters with perpetual good-humour and cleverly extricates himself from a series of difficult and complicated situations. Psmith is probably an idealized model of the author.

In some humorists of greater stature, there is a strong strain of biting satire, as in Swift, or a sense of compassion, as in Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (Translated into English as *The Betrothed*), while in others the satire remains goodhumoured and smiling, as in Horace's works. In the sphere of music, vivacity and serenity are constant features of Haydn's works, while the fun which Wagner makes in *Die Meister Singer* of academic music-makers is really diverting. But perhaps the masterpiece of musical humour is Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Figaro's self-glorification is irresistibly cheering. At a more modest level, there is no lack of songs to "smooth the furrowed brow" and bring a smile to pursed lips. Such pieces are a good antidote in moments of depression, irritation or ill humour.

Another technique, as effective as it is simple and easy to perform, involves the use of *Evocative Words*. It makes use of a series of cards, each printed with the name of a positive good quality. These cards, exhibited in positions easily accessible to a person's glance, tend to evoke in him the corresponding qualities. Phrases, aphorisms and

appropriate pictures can be used for the same purpose (See the pamphlet "The Technique of Evocative Words" available from the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation.). There is another established Psychosynthesis Exercise by which cheerfulness can be directly evoked and methodically cultivated. In the *Exercise for Evoking Serenity*, cheerfulness can be substituted for serenity. Thus modified, a description of this exercise is appended at the end of this text.

But the fundamental method of neutralizing both rebellion and self-pity is *acceptance*. Not a passive acceptance or resigned submission, but an initial acceptance, followed by the accomplishment of what is possible—if and when it is—to alter the situation. A good example: An old man was always cheerful in spite of the many troubles he had experienced. His reply to those who asked him how he managed to keep cheerful and calm was: "I've learnt to collaborate with the inevitable." What wisdom there is in those words! An expression somewhat ingenuous but fundamentally apt, is attributed to a disciple of Emerson who went to him one day and announced: "I accept the universe!". Emerson looked at her for a moment and replied: "You'd better!".

Acting "as if" is another most useful psychological technique. There are many occasions when there is no time to neutralize a state of mind, such as depression or irritation, and yet the situation must be coped with at once. This is the moment to behave *as if* the mood were nonexistent. To smile, to speak kindly to the person we would like to treat badly is no radical remedy, but it is effective. To divert our attention from a mental state helps us to disidentify ourselves from it and reduce it. But principally it eliminates the vicious circles we often create in such a form as: We are irritated and conscious of it; then we are irritated with ourselves for being irritated; we are aware that it is stupid and this increases our irritation; and so on! The same thing happens with depression: awareness of being depressed makes one more depressed, and so forth. If, however, one diverts the attention and directs it to the opposite psychological state, and if one acts as if not depressed, the negative state is temporarily reduced and controlled. The application of this "as if" technique can be further extended to cultivate inner happiness and cheerfulness *despite* suffering. Elimination of the suffering is not to be expected, but a serene and positive state of mind can be maintained during the distress. The psychological multiplicity of the human mind makes this possible because the various parts of us can, and generally do, function independently of each other. This has been succinctly expressed by the philosopher Campanella in the words "In flesh afflicted, in disposition joyous." While the body suffers, the mind can remain serene, even happy. To accomplish this it is necessary not to identify oneself with one's body, but to regard it as the instrument it is—in St. Francis' kindly phrase: "Brother Ass."

This leads to a consideration of Franciscan joy. Although St. Francis suffered much, he was happy and encouraged happiness in his friars. He used to tell them that they must be "God's jesters," in order to draw souls to God. In fact, joy, gladness, and cheerfulness are magnetic. A significant episode in the life of St. Francis tells how, when he was seeking a place in which to establish a monastery, he came to Chiusi in Tuscany. He gave a sermon at the residence of Orlando, Count of Chiusi, on the theme: "So great is the Good which I am expecting that every pain to me is joyous." His speech made such an impression that

Count Orlando offered him the Mount of La Verna for his purpose. This led to the construction of what is today a Franciscan shrine second only in importance to Assisi.

Another method of cultivating serene cheerfulness involves the recognition of the relative nature of an event, the appreciation that happenings often have effects unforeseen and even contrary to what they momentarily appear to be. This is highlighted in a Chinese parable quoted by Lin Yutang in his book, *The Importance of Living*: One day an old peasant living with his son on the top of a hill lost his horse. His neighbors sympathized with him over his unfortunate event, but he replied: "How can you tell if it is a misfortune?" Some days later his horse returned leading a number of other horses. The neighbors now wanted to congratulate him on this stroke of good fortune. Also this time the old man replied: "How can you tell if it is a stroke of luck?". The son started to ride these horses and one day broke a leg. The old man's response to his neighbors condolence this time was: "How do you know it is a misfortune?". A little later war broke out, and the son, being disabled, avoided having to take part in it.

Let us always bear this relativity in mind.

The effectiveness of a positive, smiling attitude towards life has been expressed thus by Inayat Khan: "He who looks at life with horror is in subjection to life; he who takes life seriously is within life; he who meets life with a happy smile raises himself above the world."

I should now speak of the applications of cheerfulness, but I can do so only briefly. In psychotherapy cheerfulness has a broad range of applications, since a large part of psychosomatic and psychological disturbances have their roots in the causes I have been discussing: irritation, resentment, depression, self-pity. It is thus obvious that cheerfulness is curative to the extent to which we can eliminate those emotional reactions.

I shall dwell a little longer on the application to interpersonal and social relations. Cheerfulness is an indispensable factor in family life. Much unhappiness, indeed most family failures (separations, divorces) owe their origin to the atmosphere of ill-humour, criticism, demands, to which I have referred. Cheerfulness may be said to be a lubricant of the mechanism of inter-individual life, especially the intimate relationships of the family.

There is an important point about interpersonal relations which has been emphasized by Paul Tournier, one of the pioneers in the new humanistic medicine. It is that it is necessary never to assert that one is right, and *above all* when one is or believes that one is right. Tournier says "To be right is dangerous, it has ever been the source of all intolerance." I strongly recommend this valuable maxim. When one is in the wrong, one can come to terms; but when one is right and asserts the fact, conflict results. To demonstrate to others that one is in the right is in fact to humiliate them; it is to offend their vanity and their prestige, and thus to create hostile reactions.

Good human relations in general are generated and fostered by cheerfulness. It has been said "The smile is a very powerful weapon. It even succeeds in breaking ice." One hears much these days about isolation and lack of communication. Well, a kindly smile can help to demolish artificial barriers built by distrust, suspicion and fear of being misunderstood.

Cheerfulness, and humour in general, should be constantly applied in the teaching of all subjects. Lessons—and this is particularly true in secondary schools—are too often given in such a way as to make a bore of what ought to be interesting and pleasant. Everything could be taught in an attractive and even amusing way, thus getting the cooperation of the unconscious, to which ideas must penetrate if they are to be assimilated and kept available. What bores the unconscious does not register. Some text books based on this psychological law do exist, even for mathematics, a subject in which it would seem difficult to apply. But such books are few and little used.

Another major department in which cheerfulness should find wide application is that of human relations in social life, especially the "hierarchical" association between employer and subordinates in every field: government offices, the military and business of every kind. This extends to families as well, in which cheerfulness can reduce many conflicts between parents and children. The applications are obvious and do not call for explanation, but I will simply recall a little story which illustrates the consequences of ill-humour. One morning, a Minister had a row with his wife, who happened to have the last word. On reaching his Ministry still fuming, he sent for the Under-Secretary and berated him. The latter, not being able, as a subordinate, to reply, went off in a rage and reprimanded the chief executive, who passed it on to the superintendent, and so down the line until it reached the doorman. Having no one beneath him to find fault with, he kicked the Ministry cat. The atmosphere that day in the Ministry and the way its staff functioned can be imagined. Had the Minister in question availed himself of one of the psychological techniques for discharging aggressiveness, or if he had at least wanted and known how to behave as if he had been in a good mood, the Ministry atmosphere would have been very different. All the employees would have done better work in the nation's interest... and the cat would have gone unscathed. The moral of this little tale may point out how necessary cheerfulness is in the political field as well. It is disarmingly simple to realize that if all who command had a cheerful disposition, it would greatly help to avoid wars.

Another apt approach for people in high positions, politically and otherwise, is the cultivation of a *sense of proportion*. The study of astronomy-observation of the starry heavens, pictures of constellations and galaxies-is conducive to this. It was a method which Theodore Roosevelt used spontaneously when President of the United States. A friend of his, the naturalist Begbie, relates: "Roosevelt and I used to play a little game together. After an evening of talk, we would go out on the lawn and search the skies until we found the faint spot of misty light beyond the lower left hand corner of the Great Pegasus. Then one or the other of us would recite, 'That is the Spiral Galaxy in the Constellation of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is formed from hundreds

of millions of suns, each larger than our sun.' Then Roosevelt would grin at me and say 'Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed.'"

As a balance to this, however, it is well to recognize and remember the value of each human being and of every activity of his, however humble it may be. This helps us to bring good will and cheerfulness to bear in doing *anything*, even if wearisome and boring. However apparently insignificant in itself, an activity is in reality as necessary as actions of greater prominence which seem more important. This balanced appreciation and the resulting good inner disposition are well illustrated by the story of the three stonecutters. A visitor to the site of where one of the medieval cathedrals was being built asked a stonecutter what he was doing. "Don't you see," replied the latter sourly, "I'm cutting stones," thus showing his dislike of what he regarded as unpleasant and valueless work. The visitor passed on and put the same question to another stonecutter. "I'm earning a living for myself and my family," replied the workman in an even tempered way that reflected a certain satisfaction. Further on, the visitor stopped by a third stonecutter and asked him: "And what are *you* doing?". This third stonecutter replied joyously: "I am building a cathedral." He had grasped the significance and purpose of his labour; he was aware that his humble work was as necessary as the architect's, and in a certain sense it carried equal value. Therefore he was performing his work not only willingly, but with enthusiasm.

Let us remember the example of the wise workman. Let us recognize and always be aware that, however limited our ability may seem, however modest and humble our duties, in reality they are particles of the great Life. We are participating in the unfoldment of the Cosmic Plan, "collaborating with God." This recognition will enable us to accept every situation, fulfill every task, willingly, and with cheerfulness.

EXERCISE FOR EVOKING CHEERFULNESS

- 1) Relax all muscular and nervous tension. Breathe slowly and rhythmically, express cheerfulness by smiling (It will help to assume this expression before a mirror, or visualize yourself doing so).
- 2) Reflect on cheerfulness, conscious of its value and usefulness, especially in our agitated modern world. Appreciate and desire it.
- 3) Evoke cheerfulness directly by pronouncing the word several times.
- 4) Imagine yourself in circumstances likely to worry or irritate you: for instance, in the presence of unfriendly people, having to solve a difficult problem, obliged to do various things rapidly or finding yourself in danger, and yet keeping cheerful.
- 5) Plan to remain cheerful all day, to be a living example of cheerfulness, to radiate cheerfulness.

This exercise can be done (with appropriate modifications) not only for cheerfulness but other qualities as well: courage, joy, patience, will and so on.

This exercise is based on the Exercise for Evoking Serenity published in the book *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (N.Y.: Hobbs, Dorman, 1965; paperback-Viking Press, 1971).