

Harry Allen Overstreet (October 25, 1875 – August 17, 1970) was an American writer and lecturer, and a popular author on modern psychology and sociology. His 1949 book, *The Mature Mind*, was a substantial best seller that sold over 500,000 copies by 1952. From 1911 to 1936, he was chair of Department of Philosophy and Psychology at City College of New York. He lectured and worked frequently with his second wife, Bonaro Overstreet

Part One: **Chapter 1: Psychological Foundations**

All childish minds are dangerous, but particularly when those minds are housed in adult bodies; for then they have the power to put their immaturity fully and disastrously into effect.

Invariably in grownup child minds, the immaturities are disguised from the individuals themselves.

Understanding immaturities offers us a key to unlocking problems that affect our common welfare and personal happiness.

Maturity Concept:

1. Psychological Age
2. Arrested Development
3. Conditioned Response
4. Aptitude Uniqueness
5. Capacity to Learn

All through our human society – in families, schools, communities, nations – a vast amount of conditioning is taking place that is inimical to maturity; that is inimical, even, to human survival.

A cosmopolitan man, in contrast to a provincial man, is a man with a greater chance to mature; a man with a larger area in which he can exercise his faculty for fairness and reasonableness without coming up against fixed loyalty-barriers that bid him stop.

If each individual has a certain uniqueness of power, his maturing will best be accomplished along the line of that power. A man is at his best when he is doing his best at what he can do best.

The characteristic of the mature person is that he affirms life. And to do this he must be involved heart and soul in the process of living. Neither the person whom feels himself a failure, nor the person who resents what life has done to him can be fully engaged in the living process.

To mature, the individual must know what his powers are and must make them competent for life.

Edward Thorndike 1928: Childhood is the time of learning: Adulthood is the time of having learned. If one fails in learning, inability due to age will very rarely, if ever, be the reason. Personal and cultural factors discourage adult learning, not adulthood itself.

It is a threat to our whole society to have adults stop learning, and a menace to a democratic community, especially in our rapidly changing world.

A chief method of science is that of dividing to conquer. But also science is concerned with uniting to conquer, reassembling for interpretation and application to human affairs.

The maturity concept depends on a process of integration and synthesis.

It is not uncommon for the process of learning to end because an individual is still acting out a childhood drama of dependence and submission - and is turned away from any desire to become independent and competent.

The business of man is to mature: to mature psychologically as well as physically, to mature along the line of what is unique to him and what he healthily shares with his fellow, and to continue the maturing process throughout his life.

Chapter 2: Criteria of Maturity

The life that is neurotic or psychotic has more links to the past or future, to an environment not really there, generally fantasies and illusions of dangers that are projections of fears, or slights that are projections of self-doubts.

A mature person develops linkages with life, and has learned how to operate in a human environment so that he continues to add new people to those whom he cares about and to discover new bases of fellowship with those already familiar.

A person is properly maturing only if his power over his environment is matched by growing awareness of what is involved in what he does. Those, whose powers of execution forge ahead of their powers of understanding, are dangerous to have around. The most dangerous members of society are grownups whose powers of influence are adult but whose motives and responses are infantile. They can work more destruction and inflict more pain than anyone physically immature. If they have authority over others, yet few emotional linkages with life, they can make other people miserable. As well these people have greater access to add artificial power through devices brought to them through ownership and membership. They can drive cars, own guns, and influence members to press a cause.

The human being is born ignorant. In all super-instinctual matters the newborn is totally ignorant. He is at the total-ignorance level of a life in which the knowledge potential is enormous.

It is not the mastery of this or that fact that marks a person as mature in his knowledge-relationship. It is rather his attitude toward knowing and the connection that exists between his knowledge and his situation.

If a person has no interest in any kind of knowledge except the sort that insures his survival, he is immature. He is insuring that in many situations peculiarly human he will see too little and know too little to be wise and just in his responses.

If a person through adult strength and status exerts influence that calls for a certain kind of knowledge, yet makes no effort to gain that knowledge, he is immature.

If a person takes it for granted that his current store of knowledge is sufficient for the rest of his life, he is immature. His response to new situations will be inadequate and he will develop rigidities of dogma and false pride.

The mature person tries to match increased powers with increased knowledge of what is at stake.

The human being is born irresponsible. We did not choose to be here, and for quite some time are helpless to do much about it. In a real sense, the world owes an infant its' living.

Mature responsibility involves both a willing participation in the chores of life and a creative participation in the bettering of life, year by year as helplessness turns into strength. The maturing human takes on responsibility commensurate with his powers.

Individuals must learn to accept their human role. It is immature to think of one's self as an exception to the human race.

Individuals must develop a sense of function. There must be work that they accept as their own, that they perform with certain expertise, and from which they draw a sense of significance.

Individuals must develop function-habits. Without them they become bumbler, or self-excusing, or self-dramatizing.

Individuals do not grow automatically from dependence to independence, helplessness to competence, from irresponsibility to responsibility. It is important they have a linkage with life.

The human being is born inarticulate. Most learn the language of the people around them yet few continue their verbal maturing through life. In no area of maturing is arrested development more common than in the area of communication, so much so that it's not even noticed, and considered as natural.

Mediocrity is marvelously transmissible. Especially speech.

Speech defects such as habitual dullness, pomposity, sarcasm, nagging, whining, monologue, irrelevant meanderings, over-sweetness, lack of tact, platitudinizing, pedantry, or meticulous stress of details instead of overall significance, should be regarded as character defects, and therefore a lack of maturity. These are so common that they are barely noticed.

It is through speech that we clarify our ideas and beliefs; putting these out into the public medium of language, we discover whether or not they make sense.

Our lives are in good order only if the communication linkages between us and our worlds are relatively mature and becoming more so.

The human being is born a creature of diffuse sexuality. Our sexuality is born with us. Our sexuality goes through normal stages of development before it reaches maturity.

No one can be sexually mature until he accepts his own sex nature without guilt, incorporates that nature into a rational life-plan, and is able to make sexual experience the basis of a sustained, mutually fulfilling, and creative relationship with another.

Sexual behaviors do not rise or fall above our other behaviors, as it is only one channel through which we express our character. Sex linkage must become mature.

The individual is born self-centered. To mature we must develop an understanding of our relationship with others, and embrace the 'Golden Rule.'

Growing up means growing into a complex set of social relationships, i.e. linkages of affection, sympathy, shared work, shared beliefs, shared memories, good will toward other humans.

Imagination is chiefly involved in this process. Making new wholes out of a synthesis of familiar parts, turning individual separate experiences into a complete human experience, blessing those around him, feeling their experiences as his own. Empathy. Psychic identification.

The arrested development of the imagination is, perhaps, the most common tragedy of our human existence.

Empathetic provincialism: accounts for the capacity of people to be kind to the family circle yet indifferent to people outside of that circle.

Our society implants contradictory values: urging us to be for others as brothers, and against them as competitors.

The Human being is born to a world of isolated particulars. He must mature into a world of wholes. It is in the direction of whole-seeking and whole-thinking that signifies mature our growth.

As we develop the power to lift up the part into the whole, our linkage to life becomes philosophical.

Situations are often times distorted by adults who see in part and prophesy in part only. They see with eyes of their own limited world, their own wishes, and act in terms of cause-and-effect linkages that are as faulty and restricted as their own seeing.

In this world of intricate mutual relationships, no adult person is safe to have around unless he has built a fairly sound philosophical linkage to his world.

The premise of this book is to develop a *linkage theory of maturity*, which sees a man as a creature that lives by and through relationships; who becomes himself through linkages with the non-self. These aforementioned linkages are interdependent, creating a *character structure* of closely related maturities or immaturities.

The individual is a whole of independent powers.

By making our definitions of success and goodness too narrow, even flagrantly immature individuals can qualify.

For our human salvation, we must rid ourselves of illusions that have made us accept immaturity as maturity.

Maturity in one area of our life promotes maturity in other areas.

Psychological maturity isn't measured by any single, isolated trait in a person, but by a constellation of traits, i.e. by a total character structure.

Institutions and cultures must be judged by the extent to which they encourage or discourage maturity in all their members.

Chapter 3: Two Old Theories and a New One

Two theories of human misbehavior have prevailed. The first is the goodness-badness theory; people do *good* because there is *good* in them, and *evil* because there is *evil* in them. This theory is most strongly held by authoritarians. The second is the knowledge-ignorance theory. This is beloved of schools and colleges. In general supported by more liberal minds. Both theories have the support of widespread folk conviction. Psychologists take issue with both. The power of *facts* to influence a life is limited by the individual's capacity to accept them.

People reject facts that would be for their own good, because the acceptance of them would mean giving up something that now supports or magnifies their ego, and they become defensive against facts that would destroy their own significance.

Where personal worth is soundly based, it does not have to be defensive against the facts.

Knowledge can become a virtue only if it enters into an emotional context that makes assimilation possible.

These theories should be replaced by the maturity-immaturity theory. Each person is a whole person and that it will be in his wholeness that he will reveal such fixations and emotional disturbances as keep him immature.

Goodness-badness theory employs methods of preachment, exhortation, rewards and punishment. Knowledge-ignorance theory employs methods of instructions, examination, and grading. These can be detrimental to maturity. Maturity-immaturity theory aims to help individuals see their own lives whole, and to recognize problem points in those lives and to do something objective about them.

People we call *bad*, are people we should call immature. The chief job of our culture is to help people grow up. The evil men do is the evil of their immaturity. This insight could save the world.

Chapter Four: Mature Insights Lost on Immature Minds

All the necessary truths have been spoken. A mature truth told to immature minds ceases, in those minds, to be that same mature truth. They take from it only what they can assimilate, and turn mature truth into applied immaturity.

The great truths, being only partially comprehended by the immature, have found expression in ways that have perpetuated as much misunderstanding as understanding, as much error as truth.

Profound insight becomes largely verbalism through the institutional followers that are less than masters, a degradation of truth by minds too immature to understand and put the actual insight into practice. Because there have never been enough mature people to hear truth where it has been spoken, even our greatest truths have been rendered largely impotent.

Examples of mature truths and how their immaturely applied failings:

1. Truth is one, because the source of truth is one.

This implies the splendor of a world without self-contradiction, one that understands and that responds to understanding. That this one truth (One God), has been a source of fratricidal war, indicates how far short we have fallen of being fully developed in our mature human powers.

2. Man is a creature of moral law.

In the days of Moses morality was first expressed as commands. The Decalogue. (10 Commandments) This series of universal principles has been turned into a series of taboos. As well, it has been robbed of its power toward moral maturity, by a very narrow and literal interpretation, which divides men along fanatical lines, instead of uniting them in a common insight.

3. There must be and end to special privilege and to the exploitation of the weak by the strong; social justice must come; demand for such justice is not arbitrary, but inherent in the structure of a man's relationship with man, and to flout this invites disaster.

This is the Golden Rule. The mature power must see others with the same honest concern with which it sees oneself.

Social justice goes largely unfilled, as it requires us to move out of the vivid urgency of our limited egocentric *self-concern*, which is not in the great sense of self-fulfillment. Social justice can only be found in the inclusive socio-centricity of mature minds.

4. Love One Another.

This is perhaps the most profound insight into man's nature. Man is sound in psychological health to the degree that he relates himself affirmatively to his fellow men.

The love of a person implies, not the possession of that person, but the affirmation of that person. Whenever we experience genuine love, we are moved by this transforming experience toward a capacity for good will.

Smiting one another does not work, though in an immature world it rates as common sense. The immature have thought that this truth requires them to deny their own nature, or by some divine grace to transcend this nature, when in actuality this truth asks only that they realize a mature fulfillment of this nature.

5. Man is a rational animal and his fulfillment calls for the exercise of reason.

The Greeks saw reason as a capacity, not an achievement. To the extent that a man is unreasonable – a creature of impulse, prejudice, and rationalizations – he passes judgments and performs actions that do not comport with the realities of his environment.

The man who lives by unreason, fails to utilize the one power by which man is enabled to effect a partial escape from sheer subjectivity and to enter into the same objective world that others inhabit; the one power by which he might escape from the immediate and enter into the longer time span of past, present, and future that give over to cause and effect; the one power by which he is enabled to shake off the merely customary in favor of the ideal.

The power of reason is the power to see logical implications: of similarity and difference, of cause and effect, of relations in time and space, of quantity and quality, of subjectivity and objectivity, of importance and unimportance. This is one of the most unique potentials and capacities of the human mind.

Most people have a reluctant ear for the voice of reason, as it forces them to, relinquish a position of emotional dependence, or to see their own brand of prestige and success as petty, or their ambitions as a ruthless will to dominate others at whatever the cost to their welfare. These people rationalize but do not reason, pretending they obey the dictates of their minds, when actually they are merely responding to the dictates of their own unresolved and unconscious emotional problems.

6. Man must discover his own destiny.

He must find within himself the creative sources of his own fulfillment.

To be creative without a sure, directive purpose, is to be undisciplined from the inside, fixating one at an adolescent level of self-awareness. The demand for individual *freedom from* does not carry with it a clear sense of *freedom for*, and immature minds will hurry to take refuge in new dogmatic absolutes, just as the Reformation in a spirit of independence supplanted its own new rigid orthodoxy.

To become mature we must take confident steps that lead to independent judgment.

7. The Scientific Method is a systematized expression of the fact, that man is capable of transcending his own limitations of sense and subjectivity as to gain greater knowledge about his world and about himself in that world.

Immature minds are terrified by the unfamiliar, and are ready to strike out in fear-bred rage. They are trapped within a set of beliefs and superstitions that forbids maturity. It is heresy for them to use their minds without parental authority. (The Church)

The results of science were taken over by the many; but the method of science was left to the few, unfortunate, as it is in the application of science that provides the richest promise of man's maturing.

The inventions of science magnify the power of the immature as the insight of science remains unrealized.

8. All men are created equal and have a voice in determining the political structure under which they are to live.

Class tags are man made conventions. Men should be given opportunities suited to their individual needs, not according to ancient lines of privilege, power, and nationality.

Democratic insight depends upon the mental, emotional, and social maturity of the people who make up the democracy. No democracy has ever been completely successful, due chiefly to the immaturity of the citizenry, yet it is one of a few systems willing to run the risk over a long period, wherein men have the chance to grow up in mind as well as body.

If we could only find a way to make ourselves mature, we could pick up the lost parts of ourselves and make them come alive. As long as so many of us continue to be immature, the great insights will be powerless to save the world.

Psychological growth must keep pace with physical powers. Every increase in physical power must be matched by an increase in understanding.

Part Two: Forces That Shape Us

Chapter 5: A Heritage of Contradictions

The philosophical atmosphere of our time is not clear and wholesome. It doesn't encourage maturation. It is unwholesome in two respects, one that it contains contradictory elements that create inner confusion, and two, that it may set a premium on the prolongation of immaturity. The goal must be to create a philosophic outlook that is consistent and free of inner contradictions, and that encourages the mature development of our powers.

Three major strains of cultural philosophy compete for dominance. The first is *Authoritarianism*, both religious and political. Strict orthodoxy encourages a certain kind of character. The believer is considered obliged to take things on faith, and exempt from certain areas of critical examination. These are left to a vested authority. This encourages a double sense of immaturity; mentally, in that he

forgoes the human right to ask certain questions, and emotionally, in that he accepts a basic spiritual dependence as his lifelong state.

Political authoritarianism takes the form of an increasing dominance of the state in the life of the individual. Freedom of the citizens becomes the freedom to do what is permitted by the state. Patriotism has encouraged uncritical adherence to the policies of one's own nation, and blunted the imagination to the needs, wants, and attitudes of people of other nations. This discourages linkages of understanding, sympathy and cooperation with other nations. It encourages exclusiveness that fosters suspicion and hostility. Government has become the supreme arbiter of the lives of individuals and holds average individuals in a condition of immature dependence.

Liberalism (Intellectual, Political, and Social) is the second major strain in our culture. Liberalism invites a man to try to understand the physical-spiritual workings of the universe, and to develop a relationship with this universe that agrees with his creative human status, and a relationship to his fellow man that expresses his belief in human dignity. It invites him to aspire to the high powers of sociality and rationality that exist in man. Liberalism asks man to grow up into the full stature of a self-governing and self-fulfilling human being. The liberal spirit and the sense of human dignity, in those who have been on the side of men maturing have had considerable support in the American tradition and institution.

The third strain in our culture is that of *mechanism* and anti-rationalism. We must remember that *the major philosophies of the 19th century not only did not support, but also actually contradicted, that major philosophy under which our political institutions were framed.* Mechanism and anti-rationalism encourages an immature character structure, inviting a man to remain a child in aggressive egocentricity.

There is warfare of these philosophies, or at least a truce, a pretense of wholeness where it does not exist. Thus very few of us have been whole or mature, for all of us have been conditioned by personalities and institutions that have themselves been prey to inner contradictions. This is true of the church, the economic order, the home, the school, and the political order. Unless we understand this confusion that marks our culture, and therefore our minds, we can't even begin to understand the hope of a maturity concept, or the difficulties that lie in the way of its acceptance.

All of the 19th century ideas repudiated or undermined the theory of maturity by selecting a portion of humanity – individual, nation, race, economic class – and urged it to become the triumphant protagonist in a drama of conflict in which some other portion of humanity was to be overcome. This repudiates that the human race is one in destiny because it is one in mutual need.

The 19th century was the century of power politics and power economic, i.e. of aggressive nationalism, imperialism, trusts, “captains of industry,” and “Napoleons of finance.” These men created a business civilization, guided by a dubious flock of pseudo-philosophers, and turned their theories into justifications for ruthlessness.

The 19th century did produce its measure of mature men and women, but they were not permitted to shape the dominant institutions of the period. Instead they had to hold their own against these dominant institutions.

Our culture is not marked by inner consistency, but by raw conflicts that produce common effects clearly relevant to our problem of maturity.

1. The typical member of our society is a *divided self*. A prey to doubts, fears, and inner tensions that express themselves in forms as various as alcoholism, anti-Semitism, apathy, driving ambition, faith in education, and contempt for educated people. There is a lack of wholeness within the conditioning influences brought to bear on the individual.
2. The typical member of our society is a *compartmentalized self*. His domestic self, business self, religious self, political self, conventional self-attending self, are all housed in one body, yet each remain strangers to one another. This makes it difficult to achieve inner peace.
3. In the modern age we are tempted to remain dependent and irresponsible, due to our environment where education is both exalted and despised, and where the ethic of the brotherhood of man is contradicted by the weekday fight for survival and enrichment. Confusion of values makes for a sense of bewilderment and helplessness; thus the average person gets what happiness they can out of doing what everybody else does. Accepting the going standards becomes the survival wisdom of our day.
4. Those philosophies that demand a high level of maturity command a smaller following than those that accept immaturity as good enough. Religious and political authoritarianism, as well as materialism and anti-rationalism, each offer a much easier way of life than the liberal socio-cultural philosophy that urges us to make efforts to grow up.
5. The confusion brought about by competing philosophies is further compounded by strange alliances between them, especially in emergency situations, as they resist the liberal ideal.
6. Average people can express the highest idealism and practice the crassest ‘realism’ without ever knowing that the two are in direct contradiction.

7. All the major institutions of our society are also divided rather than whole selves. The influence they exert on individuals is never one that makes for a confident and productive wholeness of character. We must examine the institutions that make us what we are, as we are privileged and obligated to remake them.

Chapter 6: Applied Maturity: A Test Case

The key problem of our period is that of expressing through adequate political and legal institutions the oneness of the human race.

A feeling of helplessness in the face of a problem basic to life (the atomic bomb) is not the sign of a mind in mature command of itself.

Our appraisal of any international disagreement in which our country is involved will be an appraisal that is slanted even before any facts are examined. (Russia) The degree of our rightness by mature standards, have to be determined by an objective analysis of motives and maneuvers, not by fixed in advance attitudes.

There is an old conviction that when there are deep cleavages between nations the thing to do is start frightening one another instead of understanding one another.

The process of psychological maturing is more often the process of receiving impressions, one after another, and savoring these impressions until they yield up their meaning, and the new experiences finally settle down among the old ones.

For Americans, the concept of independence has less to do with the full development of the self, than with the capacity to resist pressures, to overcome obstacles, to tell the other person off, to go it alone. This is immature, as it writes the ego too large, discouraging mutual understanding, inviting little empathy, militates against 'whole-seeing,' and regards yielding to another nation on any point as a defeat.

One mark of maturity is the power to think in terms of principles and the willingness to have one's own behavior measured by those principles.

The inability to sustain interest until a task is completed is immature. The national habit of responding to immediate sense data in a world of rapid change is a habit not conducive of solid sustaining of interest when a matter of real moment is at stake.

The feeling of helplessness is a mark of immaturity. It means that we are accustomed to having some authority speak the word. We find that our actual experience in citizenship has rarely involved us in a serious weighing of issues; even more rarely has it involved us in research. We have given in to party loyalties, and make up our own minds by merely quoting an authority, or we decide not to worry,

because everything will come out all right in the end, and we can't do anything about it anyway.

The old immaturities linger on – to make us inept in a new role where maturity is called for. This lingering requires us to question the institutions that have made us what they are.

Chapter 7: Economics for Human Fulfillment

Oikonomike means “the management of the household.” The word is the root for economics, which had an over-all concern for group well being. The science that dealt with the relations of goods to needs.

Industrialism shifted the emphasis from ‘goods for use’ to ‘goods for sale,’ from consumption to production. Building up surplus to be enjoyed as power.

The making of money has meant a making of unprecedented material prosperity for that portion of the planet where the money has been made.

The number of things that modern man has to know in order to understand his situation has increased far more rapidly than the number of things he does know. A smaller proportion of the things he knows can be checked by actual experience, and more must be taken on authority.

Capitalism has turned knowledge into a commodity sold on the market, thus information and misinformation reach the public in an undifferentiated mass. The facts marketed are those that the seller thinks will be the most popular with the most buyers. Thus *facts* can be merely a reflection of what some special interest group will find profitable for the public to accept.

An economics that is devoted to earning money rather than to ordering the household inevitably makes human relations secondary to profit and prestige.

The pursuit of men exerts a strong influence on the character of men, causing them to develop selective awareness, and begin to value certain aspects of their own nature over the importance of others. Activities and experiences are converted into habits and attitudes, which direct the ambitions of men as they determine friend and foe.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Where the pursuits of men make for *part-seeing*, men do not achieve *whole-seeing*; where they make ego-centered seeing, men do not achieve empathetic seeing.

Raising the standard of living is only a by-product of capitalism, whose chief pursuit has been moneymaking, which will always trump the standard of living.

Our economy has never been interested in the whole human being, only in those aspects from which some monetary profit can be derived. For him to grow into full maturity, unsusceptible to the competitive prestige appeals, would make him less valuable as a source of profit-making, than if he were remain an immature adult.

The image of man as a good consumer is, in brief, more often compatible with that of man as a perpetual impulsive child than with him as a mature being of foresight and responsibility.

Our economy fosters mental dishonesty. In our *business civilization*, institutions that are presumably non-economic in their aims have been relegated to positions of dependence upon the economic order in such a way that they, too, learn to rationalize, compromise, and practice multitudes of small dishonesties. This is true of churches and schools.

Where mental dishonesty is made to seem like common sense, or fine patriotism, the full maturing of men and women is not likely to be the rule.

Our economic system employs fear as a weapon, and breeds fear as a byproduct. This runs counter to what we know about ourselves. We distort our children by laying fear upon them at a time when they are helpless to do anything about it. Fear of losing a job, not being liked by the right people, or being invited to the right places is inimical to the full maturing of the human individual.

Fear makes for concentration on the self, not on the objective work one is doing, and thus prevents emotional maturing.

The central conception of democracy, that which gives it vitality underneath, is the conception that it is the person as a person that counts, not as a property owner, member of any class, the child of wealth or prestige, nor belonging to any race, group or religion.

When the chief pursuit of men is that of creating conditions favorable to human maturity, our economic order will itself have to outgrow its present childish standards and take on stature commensurate with its responsibility.

Chapter 8: The Play of Politics on the Mind

What happens to us politically will in large measure determine what happens to us in every other sense.

The problem of organizing society is among the most difficult to solve, as it involves the basic relationship of the individual to the social group, and the relations among organized groups, all variously strange to each other.

Politics is any activity having to do with organization of social goods. This calls for the utmost maturity, motives, and methods, and the keenest awareness of long-term cause and effects. In no other area of life has immaturity enjoyed such good standing.

We are at the mercy of our own political immaturity, and we enable our domestic and foreign policies to remain immature by “the consent of the governed.”

Political practices are, for the most part, hostile practices. Everywhere in politics this is accepted, and politicians act out impulsive, irresponsible, ego-centered immaturity.

Our historic national occupation with killing seems a sinister comment upon what we are, by nature, or conditioning, or both.

Modern man is rarely put into a position where he kills for natural reasons, responding to an immediate danger with immediate self-defensive action. Mostly he kills for social and political reasons. Man becomes a warrior only if social conditioning has made him so.

Dead men tell no tales, nor do they build civilizations. Our most pressing problem is in preventing a war that will prevent our having a human future.

If we are to mature, we understand our ‘hostility potential.’ A mature man may set himself strongly against specific persons and policies, and will marshal all his energies to oppose them. But he does so in behalf of some positive value that he attaches to human life and human experience.

One common element in our hostility potential is *ethnocentrism*, an emotional tie-up with our own group. Immaturely applied this creates an environment where approval is achieved through loyalty rather than by affection tempered with discrimination. Thus other groups are “wrong,” “dangerous,” or “backwards.”

A second element of hostility potential is *xenophobia*, fear of the stranger. It is a sign of arrested development, an automatic negative response to strangeness, and not any of the characteristics of the stranger. In political circles it is rarely loyal to be neutral to the outsider; only readiness for hostility is rated as good for the party member or patriot.

A third element of hostility potential is the emotional reaction to danger, not the fact of the danger, but the feeling of danger. This animal reaction can be culturally

conditioned, and politicians can convince us to take hostile actions by urging this feeling in us, so that we believe these actions are needed in our own self-defense.

A fourth element of our hostility potential is stored latent hostility, garnered through anger, frustrations, fears, boredoms, and disappointments marked by our individual experience. These are easily stirred up, though daily life discourages this, and they become pent up. These are easily displaced onto a surrogate object, such as an opposing party, minority, or nation, especially if the object is 'evil' in the eyes of official authorities.

Our culture and the institutions that shape us, largely determine if we will become homicidal.

Self-defense should be considered in terms of the rational organization of social goods.

Sadly, most of the political practices of men are that they reward hostility and penalize inclusive goodwill. This infects society with a virus of immaturity; power exercised in excess of understanding.

We must strive to match laws with ideals, gearing the mind to evolutionary rather than revolutionary methods of change.

We must create bodies that substitute exploration for hostility, and non-partisanship for partisanship: a rejection of fixed loyalties.

A home is not a good home that brings up children to distrust the human race.

World crisis is not a game.

The pro-social voluntary association in America is our great unsung laboratory for the making of citizens, as it encourages citizens to feel other than helpless about affairs, and encourages and rewards a readiness for mutual understanding.

We must promote a service state, which sees organized society as a means for satisfying basic human needs and providing basic opportunities.

As Americans progressively learn to think in terms of social goods, they take on political maturity.

Politics is a thing of the mind, but for politics to be mature, it must be a rational effort to organize the goods of life for the good of life.

Chapter 9: What We Read, See, and Hear

Our growth into empathy, essential to our psychological maturing is dependent on our having the chance to live vicariously the lives of many different people. We need to know what things are available for our convenience, comfort, and increased efficiency.

It is very likely that in spite of their technical achievements, their constant accessibility, and their relationship to deep human wants and needs, the media and advertising are doing as much to arrest as to promote our maturing. This is due to the financial yardstick that is applied by the producers of media.

In a profession, welfare comes first. In a business money-making is the principle goal.

What a few discriminating people like is of no great financial significance. Media's primary hunt is a formula to insure the most people being attracted most of the time. And once this is set, it is more profitable for people to remain, as they are, not in growing and gaining new insight and a higher level of discrimination.

News tends to be made as different from daily life as possible. Catastrophe sells. Mass appeal calls for giving people a thrill without requiring of them any unusual sensitivity or subtlety of insight.

Most political news is cast as *fight* news.
Most domestic news is cast as *catastrophic* news.

Media has a vested interest in catastrophe, as they have discovered that most people most of the time are more interested in a life that has "run off the track," rather than a life that has "stayed on the track." Thus media gives people the expectation that *eventfulness* is mostly conflict and catastrophe. This is a one-sided distortion of real life, and raises our hostility potential, making peaceful action more difficult to achieve. Our emotional readiness will be for belligerent action and verbalization.

Our newspapers have been cultural assets. They have done wonders to release us from old parochialisms and broaden our local into the global. Often they expose evil and fight for human decencies, but the fact remains that their major appeal has been to the psychological immaturities in grown men and women.

Radio promised a new world and remains a technical triumph. Yet it betrays our immaturity as well as fosters it, as its owners have engaged in enterprise similar to newspapers. The formula: Most of the people, most of the time, want to be entertained; entertainment that has the maximum appeal, rouse the emotions and does not tax the mind.

It shortens rather than lengthens the attention span, yet the mature mind seeks follow through.

Programs that put the critical powers of man to work, or that raise any issues about the economic structure of the advertising business, are bad for advertisers.

When an instrumentality is taken over as a money-making device, those who live by it must seek a money-making formula. All media must find their formula.

Hollywood discovered – by rule of thumb and box-office returns – the sure-fire way to attract most of the people most of the time is to give them compensatory illusions. They have become the big business through which unsatisfied (immature) people are granted a day-dream fulfillment of their hopes. Fulfillment by fantasy and escapism: This is the pattern of psychological immaturity. Fulfillment by a rational, sustained program of action; this is psychological maturity. Media is invested in emotional immaturity.

Advertising is the nation's biggest business and one of the biggest and most continuous psychological influences in our lives. The average man has only one significance: that of consumer, and his mental and emotional processes must be stimulated to make him buy. Advertisers halt our psychological growth to the extent that it *makes us do too much wanting* (that our problems stem from the lack of the right material goods) and *makes us want things for the wrong reasons* (using prestige appeals, and inviting individuals to envy others).

The art of sales is awakening self-wants. The perfect consumer is one who is so suggestible that he can be kept fairly continuously engaged in the process of indulging his own ego. Advertising is vested in human self-indulgence.

This is not the materialistic age; it is the age of self-indulgence.

1. Media is the moneymaking enterprise of mind-making. It profits from tapping into our immaturity and has been too busy to worry about long-range consequences of its formulas. They point to deep ills in our culture: boredoms, disappointments, and apathies that make adults unresponsive to any drama in life except shock; from latent hostilities that make adults draw guilty satisfaction from ill fortunes of others. Yet, we need to look beyond these powerful mind-makers for the causes of the immaturities on which they capitalize.

2. No where in the world, and at no time in history has the average man actually "made up his own mind." The dominant power group has done this by providing him an image of himself that would comport well with the power and perpetuation of that group. Psychologically, the most dangerous power groups in history have been those who have wanted the average man to be a *contented follower*. This is not exactly what media wants, they would prefer he be a *discontented follower*. In fact

media doesn't see him as a follower at all, but as a consumer: fundamentally different. Their mantra is: *the greatest amount of goods to the greatest number*. Thus, if and when we want maturity, they will cater to our mature wants as assiduously as they now do to our immaturity.

3. There are ways in which the public can learn to handle immature materials maturely. Consumer groups are evidence that the public can be more mature than a *perfect consumer*. It offers hope that a time may come that media will find it profitable to appeal to our maturity.

Chapter 10: The Home as a Place for Growing

In the home, new human beings are wholly at the disposal of the old.

No social institution is more fateful for the human race than the home. Adults who create home are responsible for what our world and culture is to be. These adults were also conditioned in the home, and then by the institutions that have laid requirements upon them. Industry, business, education, government, and religion, all are reflected in the home. Before we place full measure of responsibility upon parents, we must know the extent to which these institutions are responsible for our homes.

The American home is not something eternal and unchanging, yet its structure is largely a product of the industrial revolution. It created a machine-age home: the city, which hampers creative powers through lack of privacy, and an abundance of noise. A majority of strangers makes it tough to be a neighbor and a community. Typically the mother is too dominant and the father too far removed. Wholesome dependable contact with both parents is rarely realized. Large families are more rare, so children have less opportunity for solidarity and their own community. Without this community, adult issues can overwhelm the child.

The home is not the perfect institution that immature sentimentality makes it out to be. The mature adult will regard the home as something to be anxious about, as well as cherished.

Children must grow from ignorance toward knowledge. Homes will either be growing or fixated. Children grow by contagion. When adults are eager to learn and change, so are the children.

Children must grow from irresponsibility to responsibility. Those that lay down the rules must accept with grace the things they themselves ought to do, thus making adult responsibility seem a good one toward which to grow.

Children must grow from verbal isolation into communication. The home should be a laboratory for the development of gracious and intelligent communication, which should take priority over competitive monologues of gossip, complaint, or command.

Children must grow to sexual maturity. Adults must help children become on good terms with their own bodies and emotions. Where adults are sexually mature, that is creatively happy in their shared sex life, the radiance of their maturity is in contagious evidence. Children will learn that sexual experience is a rich part of companionship.

Children must grow away from their naive egocentricity. Affection calls forth affection; empathy calls forth empathy; consideration calls forth consideration; an out-reaching adult interest in human happiness communicates itself from parent to child.

Children must grow out of particular seeing into whole-seeing. This is the way of the philosophic mind. The wisdom of “fools” think they possess is visited upon their children to the third and fourth generation.

The home is a place for growing. It is imperatively a place where adults must be growing and where there is some knowledge of how growth is accomplished, both psychologically and physically. Nowhere in our culture is there an institution that can more deeply serve the needs of our maturing. In the home we learn the ways and rewards of genuine maturing.

Chapter 11: Education: A Question Mark

Schools are designed to pass on culture and to help the young grow into their adult role.

That the function assigned to schools permits them to do widely different things – that makes education such a challenging problem.

As public institutions, schools reflect the public, run by average adults with average interpretations of our culture. In all sincerity, these average-minded adults conclude that schools will best perform when they turn out students with attitudes like their own. This is not likely to produce liberal-minded co-creators of man’s future and persons of unique powers.

People in authority and esteem willingly abdicate; in fact they cling to power believing they are defending the right and the reasonable. Their success and experience of satisfaction won’t allow them to see anything inadequate in their own

process of success. Their own shortcomings are supported by others and invisible to themselves.

Educators are not immune to immaturity. They remain products of cultural conditioning, and pass on their immature factors.

In average schools students are led to believe that the mature art of thinking is *dangerous*. Students are naturally taught to think *within limits*. Textbooks and tests reinforce this. Students aren't exposed to materials that might create doubt and curiosities. This prepares students to *fit in*.

Right preparation of students requires an exploratory and creative attitude toward life.

A mature adult role can never be one of passive and uncritical acceptance. It must be one of creative evaluation. Using a mind to confront life and then doing what needs to be done to improve the life situation.

Schools should seek first to build a mind. A mind functions best when it makes its independent estimate of things and draws its own conclusions.

Building a mind means confronting it with problems to be solved; letting it search for relevant evidence; letting it learn to weigh this evidence; come to a conclusion, and test that conclusion. The process leads to a character structure that is modest in the face of life's complexities, honest and self-reliant in searching out facts, and un-dogmatic in assertion. This is the maturity of a self-reliant grown-up mind.

In teaching children, find the problem-situations that are relevant to *them* and let them work out the solutions.

Schools have largely failed their students because they have unwittingly kept them as civic dependents. All responsibility for the physical environment of the school is relegated to the adults. Responsibility for the psychological well-being has been relegated to the teachers and administrators. Students have learned the dependent habit of living in the school community, with very little involvement in the arrangement of governance, allowed in their early years to develop without any basic habits of citizen interest and civic participation, yet expected to behave as free and responsible citizens after graduation. Students must be helped to take on civic obligations in the larger community that includes the school. Civic maturity is the goal.

The rote-taught child, becomes the routine-bound adult; unconscious of whole areas of human power and interest; unskilled in self-entertainment; dependent upon the ready-made; clumsy with the materials out of which they might have learned to fashion beauty and significance.

Following the safe ways of conservatism, schools have forgotten that the very essence of our democratic culture has been a revolt against the inadequate and the outworn. Schools have judged adulthood by its current manifestations of social timidity, self-interest, and acquisitiveness; thus students have been learning to fit in and not ask too much of life.

Harold Rugg, “...we have come to conceive the school as an enterprise in living.” Every aspect of a truly vital education partakes of life itself. Learning is seen as living through novel situations. The curriculum becomes the very stream of dynamic activities that constitutes the life of young people and their elders, a social as well as a personal enterprise in living.”

Chapter 12: Toward a Religious Maturity

The greatest question at issue in our human life is whether we start with powers that enable us fairly well to work out our destiny, or whether we are defeated from the outset and must appeal to a higher power to help us out. This was settled by sacred writings, by theological disputation and politics, without even the slightest attempt to search for factual evidence. Augustine denied to our species the healthy blessing of self-respect, and he did this not by a body of competent minds, but by his power to influence the synods of the Church. Without question, institutional might made Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, right.

Augustine was right that no man starts with a biologically and psychologically clean slate. On the other hand, he was wrong, as far as the available evidence shows, that any man starts life cursed by a will to do evil, and that he has no chance to direct his powers towards decency and wholeness.

The *will to disobedience* the Augustine found in us, is merely the expression of the inevitable conflict between a helpless creature trying to grow into its proper independence, and an environment that the immature child can neither understand nor master.

Christianity prematurely condemned man to a psychological hopelessness to which Christ himself bore no witness, and declared man impotent to work out his psychological salvation. It encouraged man to distrust and malign himself, and to remain a dependent child. By a strange quirk, Adam’s disobedience became more important than man’s potential love of God and neighbor.

Jesus’ true message was that a mature man’s way to save himself is that of growing into the fullness of his powers-and to into the knowledge that the greatest of these powers is love.

Where something as complex and inadequately known as our own nature is being dealt with, there is a need for a constant alertness to new discoveries and implications. *Man should be a mind on its way to knowing more than before.* Movement toward wholeness of linkages is what *life is for*. This is what Jesus affirmed, and this is what psychologists and psychiatrists are confirming: *growth means*: human fulfillment, moving towards wholeness of life; this is the chief end of man.

The religious leaders such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, architects of the Christian Church, created an institution that has largely operated through a system of prohibitions and permissions, fear and punishment, hope and reward, as its basic motives. It offers no strong invitation to exploration nor wisdom.

Religion in the sense of *binding together* invites man to a mature relationship with life. It should encourage a constant effort to link oneself, in joy and contributions, to all the life-giving moments of one's world. When it is mature, religion aims at man's maturing.

Buddha had to fly blind. His life was ennobled by his courageous persistence in searching for an elusive truth. His way of getting rid of desire was to outgrow egocentricity, through right view, right aim, right action, right speech, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation (the eight-fold path).

Unity of religions can only be achieved among religions that accept the maturing of man as the central aim of life. Difference of outer form make no real difference when there is the belief that man is a creature of dignity whose proper destiny is to grow into maturity of selfhood. Love is the greatest common denominator. It is the power that moves man to outgrow his childish mind and spirit and to become happily and responsibly mature.

Chapter 13: What We Ourselves Can Do

Though profoundly as institutions and customs of our culture influence us, there is in all of us a margin for initiative.

Our life can grow in power and happiness as it links itself productively to life other than our own; through willed knowledge, through responsibility, through grace and clarity of words, through empathetic feeling, through sexual understanding, though philosophic grasp.

We don't have to wait for special occasions. Every situation in life offers opportunity for mature and immature responses. It is out of the little things that the mature or immature atmosphere of our homes and work life is created. Every organization presents opportunities for mature and immature responses.

A person has to be mature to raise issues, and know the important from the unimportant. It does take courage at times.

There are no neutral spaces in life. Every response in any situation is revelatory of character structure.

We must associate ourselves with groups that promote maturing. It is in the area of our voluntary group organizations that the great battle between maturity and immaturity goes on.

Self-dedication and self-discipline may take many forms. The important thing is that the individual lend himself heart and soul to something beyond his own ego gratification.

Our culture has idealized immaturity, because our only alternative to childhood was adulthood, not maturity. We must achieve a new significance and a new creative happiness in maturity. We must contrive a plan for growth of the mind that has breadth and depth and continuity. As we age we must enter into a new dimension of life in which a new and zestful activity of our minds will bring experiences that more than compensate for the loss of younger years.

We must end the idealization of childhood. The fact that our culture has not given to adults even a fraction of what through schools, colleges, and universities it so generously give children and youth, is a sufficient indication that adults have no profound belief in the dignity of being adults.

Adult education should be aimed at transformation, not amelioration. It should recognize their entrance into a new and significant stage of life-experience. Psychological maturing is our most triumphant way of human fulfillment; and the adult years are the only years in which this can be experienced. Only adults can experience mature insight. Children can only live years of various frustrations.

Adulthood is the significant period toward which life heads. It is the time of fruition. Yet adults remain un-serviced by the institutions of our own culture.

Adults need to see themselves with the eyes of maturity. They should make adult attempts at a mature self-understanding.

Adults should look back upon their lives, in order to judge with wisdom, how young lives should be properly brought up. They should research the particular environments that shape us all, and take a frank and intelligent look at their community. Then they should approach the wider world, and lift themselves out of the illusions and miscomprehensions of the media, and learn what lies behind the clutter, seeing the world in its inner motivation, and seeing national and world events as the inner life of men finding its outer expression.

Adults must make themselves at home in the great human tradition, spending their time moving into an inheritance of the spirit willed to them by their forefathers.

Maturity learning would then be put into practice.

The practice of creating: the experience of making the world become flesh.

The practice of obligation: some project for human betterment, or of bringing more reasonableness to the human scene.

The practice of research: (With surface minded opinions come surface dogmatisms.)

One sustained adult experience of rigorous research would make all superficial thinking tame.

The practice of sociability and play: Adults, coming together for the sake of enjoying each other, and for the relaxation of doing things that have the life-sustaining un-seriousness of play.

The practice of the enjoyment of maturity: There is no time and place in which the adult is exempt from the obligation to practice maturity, nor without the power to enjoy maturity. If an adult responds to a situation with a mind open to what needs to be learned, he practices and enjoys maturity. If he is ready to act responsibly, subsumes his ego, seeks self-understanding and wise understanding of others; if he tries to see in whole instead of part, he practices and enjoys maturity.

Adulthood is a stage of life with significance that no other stage can possess. It is the time of putting into effect the wisdom about life that childhood and youth are unable to even possess. This is the dignity of the mature adult, one who is not marking time in a prolonged adolescence.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Where there is no maturity, there is no vision.

The evils come from immature responses to life, not from deep within us. Our obligation is to grow up.

Notes from The Mature Mind – H.A. Overstreet – 1949 – W. W. Norton Books
Dr. Todd R. Wilkinson – Ottawa University