

KNOWING AND BEING [Regarding Parenting and Pretense]

IS there a way to escape from the confusions which result from the endless arguments and conflicts about "morality"? Some form of the pursuit of Righteousness, it now seems clear, is an unsuppressible tendency or need of human beings. Of it we can say that no objective in human life is more vulnerable to misconception in thought, and to hideous distortion in practice; while, on the other hand, the systematic denial of meaning to moral longing has even worse consequences.

The most intuitively acceptable model of an ideal moral order given in experience is probably the family. The virtues of good parents seem practically archetypal. Parents have a natural authority based on their experience as adults, and deserved through their devotion to the care and nurture of the young. In his relations with his children, a wise father is expected to combine love and patience with a refusal to falsify the nature of the world with which the children will have to cope when they grow up. This means progressive instruction in how to distinguish between appearance and reality, regulated according to the child's slowly growing capacity to understand. Various "lights" are necessary to illuminate the difference between appearance and reality, for the obvious reason that "reality" is of several sorts. One of these lights is the light of a moral ideal—a conception of what might or could be, in contrast to what is. Now the fact is that the light of the moral ideal chosen by the father—parent or instructor—*tints* all the other levels of reality, and defines their ultimate relation to human good. We could say that it is the task of the philosopher in the father to make this clear to himself; and then it becomes the task of the teacher in the father to communicate this understanding to his children. Yet none but the wise can do this well. The best that a good man can do—a good man being one who knows he is not wise, and who refuses to pretend that he is—is to try. The virtue of the good lies mainly in their rejection of pretense. Yet all men who teach—which includes all fathers—need trust. They can not teach without it. So, in a world of imperfect men, there is no learning without risk. This means that teachers and pupils are practically all exposed to and will make mistakes. This seems inevitable. What is *not* inevitable is the deceptions that result from pretense. An ignorant man can refuse to lie. Since he is a father and a teacher, he cannot function without trust, but the light of the moral ideal—the best, let us say, that he knows—cannot survive pretense about the certainty that light provides. There is no social disintegration as inevitable or certain as that which comes from a system of morality which, little by little, relies more on pretense than light. Even its truths are seen as lies, in the negative light of the exposure of pretense.

Undoubtedly, the most important thing to consider, here, is the fact that the corruption or misuse of the initial relationships of trust in no way makes them unnecessary. There can be no human association without them. Trust, for example, remains the tacit dimension in all government that relies on anything better than fear or terror to maintain order. This is quite clear from books like Guglielmo Ferrero's *The Principles of Power*. In a democratic society, of course, little is said explicitly about the crucial importance of trust. Yet it is still the tacit dimension of *social* reality behind all public functions. Officials are *trusted* to give a true account of their intentions in behalf of the public good, and to supply accurate reports of what they are doing and have done. Trust in the broad authority of elected rulers is periodically validated at the polls, or it is withdrawn. So, quite plainly, trust is the moral capital of the organic or *working*