

MAN AND HUMANISM

I have just completed rereading C. P. Snow's essays on *The Two Cultures* and the *Scientific Revolution*, in which he presents arguments for viewing with alarm the separate paths trod by literary intellectuals and scientists. After reflecting on Snow's thoughts, one would have to be slow not to realize the threat posed to society when two powerful cultures can't or don't communicate and are often working at what appear to be cross-purposes. However, there is another, far greater danger to society. For better and worse, the literary and artistic crowd and the scientists both have secure and powerful roles in our civilization. Will there ever be a time for humanists? It appears to me that it will be the fate of mankind — for this is our history — to continue denying our human relatedness and the goodness that can come from it.

I have recently completed a study of children in state institutions for the mentally retarded (*Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*, Allyn and Bacon, 1966). I have learned a great deal during my visits to those institutions about the treatment of the severely mentally retarded. But, essentially, I have learned something about the dominating factor that influences Man in his treatment of other human beings. And this is a concept worth striving to understand, especially if one is interested — as I have been — in the behavior of teachers and how to influence it. Through the years, I have been perplexed by the great differences teachers exhibit in their treatment of children and, even more so, the astonishingly different ways an individual teacher behaves toward different children in her classroom. By this I mean, it has always puzzled me to observe a teacher show warmth and understanding toward one child while, on the other hand, consistently derogate and cruelly treat another child. Believing that the affective dimension is certainly as important as the cognitive one in promoting a decent learning environment, the above observations have been of no little concern to me. However, although I know they exist, I have been about as puzzled as anyone else in explaining why they exist and why we permit them to continue. Now, as a result of studying institutionalized children in very punishing environments, I believe I now have a glimmer of enlightenment that I want to share with you. I can best explain this through a discussion of anti-vivisection.

It has always intrigued me to think about why anti-vivisectionists are so passionate in their beliefs concerning the use of animals for scientific experimentation. To me, animals have always been creatures to enjoy, to act kindly toward, and not to inflict any unnecessary punishment on. I believe this is the way most thoughtful human beings view the animal kingdom, and I think of myself as a reasonable man. However, I would be less than candid if I did not admit that stories about carefully controlled, and apparently necessary animal experimentation never offend me. On the other hand, there are people, some of our closest friends, who cry real tears and display deep emotions when confronted with cruelty to animals. During my institutional study, I began to understand, finally, why anti-vivisectionists are the way they are and why I am so different. Further, I began to understand how certain human beings can be treated so dispassionately and cruelly in institutions — or in schools — while others are treated with thoughtfulness and kindness. Anti-vivisectionists must conceive of animals in ways other people conceive of human beings. If one looks at the anti-vivisectionist in this light, it is not difficult to understand his anguish in observing inhuman behavior to animals. Certain other human beings have been taught or trained — or this is part of their natures — to conceive of other human beings in ways that most of us think of animals. If this is so, it is not difficult to understand why too many institutional attendants and too many public school teachers treat the mentally retarded, the emotionally disturbed, the incompetent scholar, and others who "don't fit the mold," in the ways they do. It isn't that these attendants and teachers are cruel or incompetent people — although sometimes they are — but they have come to believe that those in their charge are not either really or equally human.

I believe that in whatever ways we implement programs and reconstruct philosophies and practices of teacher education, our most forceful thrust must be in our attempts to reconceptualize our understanding of the nature and prerogatives of Man. More important than the desperately needed increased per capita expenditure for institutional care or public education, more important than the obvious necessity to reduce class sizes and the crowdedness of most institutions and public schools, more important than teaching better methodology courses at the School of Education or making our university students more competent scholars and more highly trained scientists, is the necessity for infusing a funda-

mental belief among all who work with children that each of these individuals is equally human.

Most teachers enter our School of Education with very strong humanist convictions, i.e. Man, his interests, and his development are dominant preoccupations of university students preparing as teachers. Most beginning teachers enter this noblest of all professions with compassion for children and a dedication to help them grow and learn. However, I am despondent by the notion that the humanistic convictions of these young people become tarnished during the years of their training and, especially, during their beginning teaching experiences. I am distressed by the cynicism among some of our colleagues that begrudges the humanism necessary for any productive human interaction, such as the teacher-learner affair.

To my regret, I do not have any valuable insights to contribute toward the programming of humanism in our schools of education. However, maybe we will have made some progress when we admit that the teacher is, first and foremost, a human interactor whose major purpose is in influencing other human beings. In a remarkable recent book, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. developed what I believe is a beautiful and profound insight, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." Maybe the first step is to teach ourselves to pretend to be interested in all children we teach and to pretend to teach all of those in our charge with equal compassion and thoughtfulness, if not wisdom. Maybe, as Vonnegut suggests, in pretending we will become as we behave.

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