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BECOMING A LAWYER: A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM by Elizabeth Dvorkin, Jack Himmelstein, and Howard Lesnick

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BECOMING A LAWYER: A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM. By Elizabeth Dvorkin, Jack Himmelstein, and Howard Lesnick. St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1981. Pp. v, 211. \$9.00.

Becoming a Lawyer: A Humanistic Perspective on Legal Education and Professionalism is a book that should be read by every person contemplating a legal career. It is extremely valuable to the first year law student who must make the transition from lay person to legal analyst. As the title suggests, it is one of the few available sources which discusses the humanistic side of legal education and the tensions involved in the process of becoming a lawyer. In their comments, the authors suggest that there is a growing interest in incorporating the humanistic approach into the law school curriculum. Today, some of the leading law schools in the country are only beginning to experiment with this concept.

The book consists of reflections upon past and present legal education, great literary passages, and personalized commentaries. After reading only a few pages, the reader grows comfortable with the format and experiences a sense of *deja vu*. The passages are from well-known, well-read literary works, and the commentaries describe the experiences of law students, law professors, and attorneys. The commentaries are interesting because they are easily recognizable and down to earth. This seems to be the central theme of the book—reconciling the human side with the developing professional side of the law school experience.

In the beginning, the authors examine the subtle process of the professionalization which occurs during law school. One of the weaknesses of the law school curriculum addressed by the authors is its almost exclusive focus on the development of analytical and advocacy skills, a focus which places great value on precision, logic and creativity. While these skills are vital for the profession, they are not the only ones that lawyers need to have. Without some recognition of humanistic qualities, the law student is learning to function as an automaton within a vacuum. This is harmful because it is not the role that is required of attorneys in the real world. The authors suggest that the law school atmosphere itself minimizes the importance of law students being aware of themselves and others as human beings. They question the quality of legal education in this respect because the very first thing practicing attorneys come face to face with is clients: real people with real problems. Law schools do not adequately prepare law students for this harsh reality.

The authors admonish the law student to take the responsibility for finding meaning for his or her life. When many people first start law school, they go through a difficult period of adjustment. Under the stress of developing their logic and objectivity, students begin to feel that emotions are largely out of place in law school. As a result, students often are forced to suppress their natural human tendency to seek self expression. In fact, legal education actually encourages evasion of the struggle to find meaning. Consequently, many law students and lawyers who are not sure why they are in the field go through the motions without direction, and are bitter about their careers. It is for this very reason that the authors state that it becomes the

students' responsibility for finding meaning for their lives; the law school environment provides no such practical guidance.

Another issue about which the authors express concern is the law school's value system. From the moment first year students walk through the front doors, and even sometimes before that, they are told to strive for certain goals. These goals emphasize earning good grades because "grades will get them everywhere." Good grades will help them acquire a position in the top ten percent of the class which, in turn, will enhance their chances of making law review, another essential. And ultimately, they will be able to practice anywhere they desire. This socialization process which emphasizes grades tends to displace the yearning for knowledge itself. Law instructors, further, are frustrated by students who exhibit this attitude toward learning, and yet, they often reinforce the belief that personal values and social ideals are obstacles to learning the law and becoming a skilled lawyer.¹ This essentially leads students on a straight path toward the kind of work or career they do not want. On the other hand, if law students think about themselves, give deference to their own social values, and respect their own beliefs, it is more likely that when they do go out into the world they will not feel disillusioned.

The authors see the problem of reconciling the real and the ideal as illustrative of one of the major paradoxes of legal education. In law school, ideas are consistently tossed around and most class discussions linger on the abstract. The authors feel that there is a strong need for more integration of ideas and human experiences, and they address this concern throughout the book. As Jack Himmelstein stated in one of his commentaries, ideas to the exclusion of human experience "can deaden a classroom, stifle an institution, rigidify a system, and restrict a life."²

Becoming a Lawyer addresses many of the shortcomings of today's legal education, through the experiences of its authors as well as the law students, professors and administrators who worked in collaboration with the authors. The book, however, does not seek to describe a humanistic legal education, nor does it provide criteria for changing the present system. The authors only suggest a direction in which meaningful development can occur.³ They are only now just beginning to explore the possible implications of the humanistic approach on legal education and the law.

As a first year law student, I have found the book most helpful and very thought provoking. The more I read, the more I thought about my own experiences and the easier it was for me to agree with some of the authors' comments. The book was quite easy to follow, although some of the literary works were difficult to understand. However, there was at least one commentary following every literary passage in which the writer would place the theme of the passage in the context of a real experience, thus making interpretation easier. The very structure of the book introduced so many ideas that the purpose of the book was vivid, but not so complete that there was not room for the reader to reflect and explore those ideas.

1. E. DVORKIN, J. HIMMELSTEIN, and H. LESNICK, *BECOMING A LAWYER: A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM* 71 (1981).

2. *Id.* at 149.

3. *Id.* at 3.

Many of the comments addressed in the book were identical to my own suppressed impressions of law school and I was able to relate to the various situations portrayed throughout the book. I was enlightened as to other ways to view my life, both in and outside of law school, which is almost a must. I was previously under the impression that my personality was not suited for law because of my difficulty in thinking in a totally objective fashion. I also had reactions to certain comments made in class which I felt were not appropriate to express because they were probably too emotional. Now I realize that I am experiencing what most students experience. Further, I should follow my own instincts toward the kind of career I would like to have. If for no other reason, the book is well worth reading for the message it has for the legal technician: Be true to oneself.

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