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Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Science Board, and many others. So many, in fact, that as the year wore on education writers liked to point out that we were faced not only with a rising tide of mediocrity in our schools but with a rising tide of education reports as well.

After years of languishing on the back page, education was suddenly news again, making headlines and provoking a remarkably lively national debate on the condition of elementary and secondary education in the United States. By February of 1984, according to a Newsweek poll, two-thirds of those interviewed rated the quality of American education as one of the most important issues facing this country today--more important than inflation, relations with the Soviet Union, protecting American jobs, or the Federal deficit.

Many people assume that the outpouring of reports on education was responsible for this extraordinary surge of public interest. This assumption is only partly true, in my opinion. The education reports of 1983 were at least as much an expression of public concern about our schools as they were a source of it. Secretary of Education T. H. Bell appointed the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1981 because he had noted a persistent public dissatisfaction with American education, and a growing uncertainty as to whether or not we were succeeding in educating our children as they should be educated. The education reports of 1983 tended to act as a

catalyst, transforming a vague unease into a clarion call for reform; but they did not create the national concern about education. It was the other way around. The national concern about education created the reports.

The many individuals and groups that scrutinized American education differed in experience, perspective, approach, and emphasis. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, for example, stressed the importance of what it called the Five New Basics--English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science--as the core of the high school curriculum. The Carnegie Foundation report emphasized the teaching of the English language, the National Science Board the need for more students to study science and mathematics.

But whatever the differences, they agreed on one essential point: American schools were in trouble and in need of significant reform, and not just minor adjustments or superficial repairs. The reports both reflected and reinforced a growing national consensus that something needed to be done about education in America. This conviction has created the first opportunity in nearly three decades to bring about fundamental and lasting change in our schools.

The humanities need desperately to be heard in this debate. There is at present a once in a generation opportunity to assert their significance and to influence the course of the

reform movement, to secure and in some cases recapture the place of the humanities in the education of our young people. I suspect it will be another generation--perhaps longer--before such an opportunity offers itself again.

What can the humanities say about themselves, what evidence can they offer, on behalf of their place in modern American education?

The humanities are, first of all, our connection with the past. Literature, history, archeology, philosophy, languages, linguistics--these and related disciplines, along with the fine arts, make up the great cultural stream of humane learning that constitutes our most precious legacy. The humanities are animated by the urge to understand human beings in all their complexity and contradictions; their capacity for pain and pleasure; their potential for good and evil; their instinct for play and their thirst for meaning and purpose. As disciplines, the humanities warrant a central place in education because they are devoted to the task, as one scholar put it, of "discovering what it means to be human." The mirror of the past reflects what other human beings have thought and felt and believed and suffered in the process of finding their own humanity.

In California society, where rootlessness is not just a passing social condition but nearly a way of life, the

capacity of the humanities to bring meaning and value to human experience is of profound importance. I am not suggesting that reading King Lear or studying the French Revolution can erase the damage inflicted by broken homes, social and racial tensions, or the shock of constant change. But I am suggesting that for people who rarely experience a sense of order or harmony or beauty or love in any aspect of their lives--and there are many--the humanities have something of power and significance to offer, as, of course, they also have for all of us, whatever our circumstances.

For the humanities not only connect us to our past; they also hold out the potential of connecting everything in our experience. They help us make sense of the sometimes conflicting, sometimes frustrating, sometimes pleasurable events we encounter each day. They offer us the experience of wholeness because they touch us at the deepest levels of mind and personality. They are inclusive disciplines, helping us to create larger and more comprehensive meaning out of the fragmentariness of everyday life.

In light of their self-evident significance, the humanities would seem to have a logical claim to be at the center of the curriculum--as, indeed, they once were. Yet everyone knows this is not presently the case. Humanists and others similarly concerned have complained that American society neglects these disciplines, and that the extent of this

neglect can be seen in the education reports of 1983, including the report of the commission I chaired. One critic, for example, puts it this way:

The leadership of America, intellectual as well as industrial and corporate, still regards the arts, the humanities, and the notion of a core curriculum of liberal learning as something "in addition to," as "soft," enriching but not substantive or central to education.<sup>1</sup>

And Richard Lyman, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, asks a plaintive question in speaking of the condition of the humanities today. Why, he asks,

does it seem that the humanities must constantly defend their right to exist and flourish in these United States? In what other country is there a new commission on the humanities every few years, justifying the existence over and over again of fields of knowledge one might imagine would scarcely need justification--languages, literature, history, and philosophy?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Engel, Martin. "The Arts Are Hard Work," Design, November/December 1983, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Lyman, Richard W. "Drinking at the Mirage," Columbia Magazine, November 1983, p. 35.

Lyman offers a number of reasons for this situation, among them the practical and democratic tendencies of American society, which encourage people to value the so-called "hard" sciences and to suspect the humanities as elitist. Thus, over the course of this century, the physical and social sciences have attracted an increasing share of financial support, public approval, and prestige. And the humanities, which once formed the center of the curriculum, have been steadily edged toward the periphery.

But it should at least be noted that if the humanities have lost ground in our schools and colleges during the past century, not all the responsibility lies with the utilitarian and populist tendencies in our national character. Part also rests with the humanities themselves, with what they have claimed--and not claimed--for themselves as disciplines and as modes of thought.

Mortimer Adler observes in The Paideia Proposal that the Latin word humanitas--from which our term "humanities" is derived--did not mean a specific set of disciplines but something much broader: "the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings." Thus, the humanities are concerned with the knowledge and skills we must acquire and the ultimate questions that we must comprehend if we are to function as complete human beings.



It seems to me that the most serious problem facing the humanities is not inadequate funding or an unappreciative public, significant though these may be. It is that we have allowed the humanities to be defined too narrowly, as if they were indistinguishable from any other discipline in the curriculum except as to course title shown in the catalog and schedule of classes. We describe them--do we not?--as discrete disciplines, as specialized and insulated as all the others--indeed, I referred to them in that fashion at the outset of my remarks. I did so deliberately, not only to make this point but also to make clear how generally we are willing to have the humanities so described. By doing so, we encourage the tendency to set them apart from all other disciplines when we should instead be seeking to reconcile them with other fields of knowledge. The tendency to isolate the humanities from other intellectual endeavors is especially evident when the humanities are pitted against science--as if they represented two irreconcilable ways of knowing and understanding. In reality, of course, the sciences and the humanities are in many respects complementary and supplementary. Each helps us understand our world and ourselves. Each illuminates the other, and when the light from one casts a shadow on the other we should remember that light and shadow require one another for either to have meaning.

But they work in different ways, and the specialization that has worked so spectacularly for science has been far less beneficial to the humanities, especially in the teaching of them. What is so surprising is that humanists, instead of resisting the tendency to insulate their disciplines, sometimes seem to embrace it. Specialization is not merely accepted; it appears to be eagerly sought. Unfortunately, in trying to make themselves just like every other discipline--and especially the more empirically inclined ones--the humanities diminish their significance, obscure their essence, and isolate themselves from events that are changing our world and theirs irretrievably.

To friends of the humanities, this state of affairs is disturbing in the extreme. Alienation and the sense of powerlessness from which alienation springs will not create a better situation for the humanities. Nor will this state of affairs easily permit humanists to take advantage of the present opportunity to improve the education offered to our young people.

It is fundamentally important, in my view, that the humanities not be isolated or cut off in this way. As someone who cares about the humanities, and as someone who also cares about the kind of education we make available to our citizens, I wish now to suggest some of the ways in which the humanities can

play a more effective role in the broad educational reform movement that is gathering strength in this country.

First, we need to think about the humanities in terms of their broad humanizing role in education, not just as occupants of narrow disciplinary "pigeonholes." If the humanities are to be involved with ultimate issues, with what is essential for human beings to know, then they must be connected to the larger problems and broader movements of our times.

This suggests the need to foster the relationships between humanistic studies and other kinds of learning. For example, modern society and modern life cannot be understood without some understanding of the role of science and technology and what these forces in our society mean for each of us and for the human condition generally.

In one sense, science and technology are instrumental. They make the conditions of human life easier, at least for those fortunate enough to live in the industrially advanced nations--easier in countless ways, from increasing one's general health and life expectancy to reducing the drudgery of daily work. Science and technology, however, cannot tell us what to do with those extra years, or what pursuits should occupy our leisure, or what pursuits are worth pursuing. So they are incomplete without a perspective on what matters in life.

In another sense, however, science and technology are more than mere instruments. They have altered human life in profound and far-reaching ways. They will do so even more in the future than they have done in the past. And they have given us a perspective on the universe that has become an integral, if often unconscious, part of the fabric of our lives. The electron microscope, to mention one example, has opened up an extraordinary and beautiful world that would otherwise have been forever closed to us. So has the linear accelerator. So also will the telescopes we will soon be building, telescopes so powerful that they promise to reveal more definite information about the creation of our universe than was ever thought to have been possible to obtain by empirical means.

These and other advances in scientific knowledge, of course, have raised monumental problems of ethics and morality: Do we have the right to create new forms of life? How can we productively engage our capacity for prolonging human life and diminishing human suffering? How can we commit to peaceful purposes the power of the atom, instead of permitting that power to paralyze us with fear for our very existence, and for the planet we share with each other in infinite space? How is space to be used and the oceans shared to benefit rather than offend the human condition?

It is not possible simply to impose a humanistic perspective on these questions; it requires instead a complementary understanding of science and the humanities to sift through the variables that make these questions so difficult to answer, or for that matter even intelligently to ask. This means, in turn, that students graduating from our schools and colleges and universities should have made the connection between science and the humanities such that the one informs the other, each contributing in its own way to the completeness of view and wholeness of perspective needed for comprehension.

We need to recognize, then, that recent advances in science, and the profound questions science has raised, touch the humanities every bit as much as developments in philosophy or literature or art. If the humanities are to play as meaningful a role today as they have historically, they will need to engage themselves with what science and technology have told us about our world and about ourselves.

One example of the approach I believe is needed comes from the University of Utah, where I spent ten years as President. As part of the undergraduate honors program, the University of Utah offers a five-quarter lower-division course that provides students with a perspective on the intellectual development of Western civilization. It does so by integrating the study of science and the study of the humanities. The course is taught by two professors, one a scientist and one a humanist--in the

seven years that this course has been offered, the scientists have been either physicists or biologists and the humanists have been drawn from English, languages, and classics. The reading list consists only of original sources, and both professors attend all the classes, read all the assigned material, review most of the students' written work together, and plan the course jointly. One version of the course, for example, takes as its unifying theme the relationship between scientific thought and society's views on such matters as epistemology, ethics, politics, and religion. Students are asked to explore some interesting questions: Could Thomas Hobbes have written The Leviathan without the stimulus of Renaissance science? Would what we call the Enlightenment have been possible without Newton? What scientific assumptions underlie medieval religious thought? What does Dante's universe owe to Hellenistic science?

Just as important, students are encouraged to look at science and the humanities not as mutually exclusive activities but as complementary intellectual endeavors that have something to say to each other. This experience is often as vivid for the professors as for the students, because it requires scientists and humanists to step out of their customary and familiar roles and to look at their own field through the lens of another. One physicist who participated in teaching the course had this to say about the experience:

This is an example of what a university can be: a common pursuit that cuts across customary disciplinary boundaries. One will find that he learns a good deal, not only about subjects which he probably has not pursued since undergraduate days, but about science as well. . . . For many physicists there are frequent surprises in the history of their subject: the almost clairvoyant Pythagorean vision of a relationship between nature and mathematics, Plato's premonition of an axiomatic theory of the universe in his Timaeus . . .

This professor takes note of the conventional objections to the offering of such courses:

Humanists and scientists cannot teach together because they are too different. One can't use original sources because no suitable texts are available. The humanistic and scientific parts of the course cannot be tied together; one simply ends up with two courses running concurrently. It is too much work. It costs too much. It requires an absolutely unique combination of peculiar people.

He says, in conclusion, that "It is our seven-year experience that all these statements are false."



This example is drawn from the university level, because that is the one with which I am most familiar. But students should not have to wait until their university studies to acquire an understanding of the connectedness of science and the humanities and how each affects the other, or of connections between the humanities and virtually everything else they study. Students in the schools need to possess an appreciation of these relationships and a base of knowledge about them irrespective of whether they enter the work force out of high school or pursue more advanced study.

Second, we need to strengthen not only the connections among disciplines but also those between levels of education. My impression is that there is a growing recognition of the need to forge stronger links between the teaching of the humanities in our schools and in our colleges and universities. The University of California, I am pleased to say, is sponsoring several promising efforts in this direction, among them the CLIO Project, a joint effort on the part of the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley and the California State Department of Education to improve the teaching of history in the schools. One of the most encouraging developments in this area has been the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose willingness to involve itself in the welfare of the humanities in the schools is both welcome and timely. And of course the California Council for the Humanities grants announced this evening are another important step toward



greater collaboration among humanists at all levels of education.

Moreover, we need to approach these joint ventures not as temporary arrangements but as long term partnerships, a lesson we learned from the reforms undertaken a quarter of a century ago in response to Sputnik.

Finally, we must work at reinvigorating our sense of the future, and I include in that not just the humanities but education generally. The past ten or fifteen years have not been easy ones for education at any level; financial constraints, public criticism, and pervasive curricular disarray have taken their toll. Low morale and diminished self-confidence have tended to reinforce the negative elements in our collective environment. Perhaps to some extent we have made our problems worse by expecting so little. Nevertheless, we should not feel hopeless about the future.

I am convinced that the conditions of contemporary life make education more important, not less, and that the same is true for the humanities. But it is up to humanists and to those who value humanistic knowledge to make the most of the two great opportunities before us--the opportunity to bring about real, lasting, and vigorous reform in our schools; and the opportunity to see that the humanities are a strong and persuasive voice in that movement.

There is one thing we do not need to do. We do not need to save the humanities. If they have something to contribute to modern life--and they indisputably do--they will survive, and, in fact, thrive.

It will be uphill work, however. I was reminded of that fact by a television commercial I saw recently. A young boy, being driven to school by his father in the family's sleek new car, asks morosely why he has to study math. The answer is immediate, enthusiastic, and clear. "Don't you realize, son," his father explains, "that this car couldn't have been built without mathematics? Or that a computer is what keeps the engine in top running condition?" He is so eloquent on the utility of mathematics, in fact, that by the time they reach the schoolyard the boy is convinced. "OK, Dad," he says as he gets out of the car, "I understand why I have to study math. Now why do I have to study Latin?"

You will not be surprised to learn that the commercial closes with the son's question, not with Dad's response--assuming he has one. And it ends that way not just because the commercial is devoted to selling cars rather than the Great Books. As a society we are not nearly as certain about why it is important to study the humanities as we are about why it is important to study mathematics. (It should be noted parenthetically that we don't study mathematics very well either.) But anything is possible, and perhaps the automobile manufacturer will make

another commercial, one in which the father pauses to answer his son's second question. Perhaps the answer will include some reference to the importance of understanding where we came from and what it means for where we are going. Perhaps it will say something about the value of welcoming several perspectives on issues of interest to us and not just a perspective limited to our own time and place. Perhaps it will suggest that there are many languages like Latin, the language of a great civilization that no longer exists in a political sense but that nonetheless informs our language, customs, laws, religions, and values; the language of science and mathematics; the language of manners; the language of art, both visual and performing; the language of DNA, the periodic table of elements, and elementary particles; and that the whole point of education is to teach us as many of those languages as possible. If I had to answer the boy's question, at any rate, that is what I would say.

Most of us here tonight are part of the national dialogue on education. We must continue to participate so that our heritage in all its dimensions, informed by what we call the humanities, will enliven our children's education, enhance our lives, and invoke the past to improve our understanding of the present and thus assure our future.

Thank you.